

The triumph of Cicero

After the flurry of writings around the middle of the fifteenth century, the next pieces of sustained humanist literary self-reflection do not come until about thirty years later. Both are ultimately products of the Roman academy of Pomponio Leto, although neither can be said directly to reflect the intellectual and cultural milieu that he created. Rather each writing announces new directions in humanism related to fresh social, political, and technological circumstances. They are also linked to particular civic settings: Paolo Cortesi's *De hominibus doctis* to Rome, Marcantonio Sabellico's *De latinae linguae reparatione* to Venice.

In his *De hominibus doctis*, Paolo Cortesi emphatically portrays humanism as the movement to reconstitute Ciceronian Latin eloquence.¹ This conception has much in common with the one reconstructed in Chapter 1, especially as seen in Piccolomini's praise of Bruni as *Ciceroni simillimus*. Here, however, the concept is simultaneously narrower and more expansive. On the one hand, whereas Ciceronian language was an object of striving and thus of inspiration in the accounts of Piccolomini and Biondo, for Cortesi it has become restrictive, a measuring stick, a prescription for rhetorical excellence to which all true, full-fledged humanists must adhere

¹ The text is available in two modern critical editions: Paolo Cortesi, *De hominibus doctis*, ed. Giacomo Ferraù (Palermo, 1979), and *De hominibus doctis dialogus*, ed. and tr. Maria Teresa Graziosi (Rome, 1973). All citations are to Ferraù's edition, hereafter cited as Cortesi, *DHD*; all translations are my own. The most comprehensive examinations of the text to date are the introductions of Ferraù ("Introduzione" and "Nota al testo," pp. 5–91) and Graziosi ("Introduzione," pp. vii–xxxii), both of which are based on previous studies that are fully incorporated into the new ones: Giacomo Ferraù, "Il *De hominibus doctis* di Paolo Cortesi," in *Umanità e storia. Scritti in onore di Adelchi Attisani* (Naples, 1971), vol. II, pp. 261–290; and Maria Teresa Graziosi, "Note su Paolo Cortesi e il dialogo *De hominibus doctis*," *Annali dell'Istituto universitario orientale di Napoli. Sezione romanza*, 10 (1968), pp. 355–376. Other short but important considerations of *DHD* are found in Robert Black, "The New Laws of History," *Renaissance Studies*, 1:1 (1987), pp. 126–156, at 132–137; D'Ascia, *Erasmus e l'Umanesimo romano*, pp. 117–124; and Martin McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Literary Imitation in Italy from Dante to Bembo* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 217–221. For earlier scholarship, see the bibliography in Ferraù, "Introduzione," pp. 7–8.

to be worthy of the title. On the other hand, linguistic virtuosity fully transcends the aesthetic dimension. Cortesi links eloquence – the ability to express oneself at the highest level – necessarily and fundamentally to the ability to think at the highest level, and thus to the excellence of any kind of intellectual or literary effort or production. In short, eloquence opens the way to the highest potential of the human mind. Cortesi intimates that this eloquence has finally returned in its full form to Italy, indeed to its ancient home in Rome, thanks to the combination of the efforts of humanists and world-changing historical events. Specifically, he emphasizes the role of Byzantine émigrés, especially Manuel Chrysoloras, in retrieving classical eloquence from Greece in a renewal of the old *translatio studii*, now brought on by the Ottoman conquest of the waning Byzantine empire.

If Cortesi largely agrees with Piccolomini, Biondo, and Facio as to the centrality of Latin eloquence in humanism, he also evinces certain commonalities with Manetti regarding the cultural significance of *bonae litterae*. In the biographies of Petrarch and especially Niccoli we saw humanism portrayed as a good in itself, as a way of life. Cortesi also depicts humanists as pursuing Latin eloquence for its own sake, for the sheer love and passion they feel for literature, out of their yearning to participate in a grand ancient tradition. Accordingly, he advises against political involvement, recommends rising above base economic interests, and prescribes a set of standards of sociability and good conduct for participation in the humanist *sodalitas litterarum*. He describes the humanist milieu in a way that makes it intelligible as a social and intellectual arena for distinction and honor, and thus he can help us to understand humanism in a way that avoids the drawbacks of Kristeller's hard-headed positivism, the teleological idealism of Garin, and the cynicism about humanists' motives encouraged by Grafton and Jardine's ostensible deconstruction of their rhetoric. As might be expected from a product of the Roman context, Cortesi subtly indicates that Roman humanism is the best and – now differing radically from Manetti – that it is superior specifically to Florentine humanism. In this respect his dialogue is especially valuable, as it gives insight into how non-Florentine humanists, who had equally proud traditions, who were far more numerous, yet who have received far less attention than their Florentine counterparts, understood the larger enterprise in which they were all engaged.

Although little known today, Paolo Cortesi (1465–1510) was a leading humanist in Rome at the turn of the fifteenth century.² Apart from studies

² This biographical sketch is based on John F. D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome: Humanists and Churchmen on the Eve of the Reformation* (Baltimore, 1983), *passim* but esp. pp. 76–80;

in San Gimignano (his family's base outside Rome), perhaps under Michele Marullo, he received his training from two of the more distinguished teachers in Rome: Platina and, most influentially, Pomponio Leto.³ Cortesi carried forward the tradition of Leto's *Accademia Romana* (beginning ca. 1490), in the sense that he opened his home to daily, informal gatherings of Rome's literary elite.⁴ He overtook Platina's position as papal scribe in 1491, held the post of apostolic secretary from 1498 to 1503, and was apostolic protonotary to Alexander VI, Pius III, and Julius II. Thereafter he left Rome permanently for his family villa, the *Castrum Cortesianum* (or *Cortesium*), outside San Gimignano, in order to devote himself to writing and to concentrate on assembling the patronage necessary to further his ecclesiastical career.⁵ *De hominibus doctis* dates to his Roman period,

Roberto Ricciardi, "Cortesi (Cortesi, de Cortesiis), Paolo," in *DBI*, vol. XXIX (1983), pp. 766–770; Roberto Weiss, "Cortesi, Paolo (1465–1510)," in *Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana*, ed. Vittore Branca, 2nd ed. (Turin, 1986), vol. II, pp. 56–58; Ferrau, "Introduzione," pp. 5–6; Graziosi, "Introduzione," pp. vii–xiii; Pio Paschini, "Una famiglia di curiali nella Roma del Quattrocento: i Cortesi," *Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia*, 11 (1957), pp. 26–48. There is debate about Cortesi's date of birth: the traditional date given is 1465, but this was challenged by Graziosi, "Introduzione," p. vii, who prefers 1471. Graziosi's redating was itself challenged by Elena Miele, in her review of Graziosi's edition in *La rassegna della letteratura italiana*, ser. 7, no. 82 (1978), pp. 254–256, and by Ricciardi, "Cortesi, Paolo," p. 766, but Graziosi's new date was accepted by Ferrau, "Introduzione," p. 5. The traditional date of 1465 may be supposed correct in light of the document stipulating Cortesi's employment as papal scribe, which was dated October 20, 1481, and claims that he was sixteen at the time; in support of this position see John Monfasani, "The Puzzling Dates of Paolo Cortesi," in Fabrizio Meroi and Elisabetta Scapparone (eds.), *Humanistica per Cesare Vasoli* (Florence, 2004), pp. 87–97, at 87–92. For the documentation of Cortesi's employment, see Paschini, "Una famiglia," p. 27; Massimo Miglio, "Una famiglia di curiali nella Roma del Quattrocento: i Cortesi," *Miscellanea Storica della Valdesa*, 108:3 (2002), pp. 41–48; and Philippa Jackson, "Investing in Curial Offices: The Case of the Apostolic Secretary Paolo Cortesi," in Philippa Jackson and Guido Rebecchini (eds.), *Mantova e il rinascimento italiano. Studi in onore di David S. Chambers* (Mantua, 2011), pp. 315–328. In general on Cortesi, see also the other three essays, by S. Gensini, G. Fragnito, and M. Giannini, collected in *Miscellanea Storica della Valdesa*, 108:3 (2002); all four essays were initially supposed to appear in the acts of the 1991 conference "Paolo Cortesi e la cultura del suo tempo," which were never published. I would like to thank Philippa Jackson for pointing out to me several of these bibliographical references.

³ For Platina, see below, note 84. For Leto, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 139.23–140.3. In addition to the bibliography listed in *ibid.*, p. 140, n. 39, see Maria Accame Lanzillotta, *Pomponio Leto: vita e insegnamento* (Tivoli, 2008); Anna Modigliani et al. (eds.), *Pomponio Leto tra identità locale e cultura internazionale. Atti del convegno internazionale (Teggiano, 3–5 ottobre 2008)* (Rome, 2011); and the online resource *Repertorium Pomponianum*: <http://www.repertoriumpomponianum.it/>.

⁴ Contemporary descriptions cited in Paschini, "Una famiglia," pp. 35–36, and in D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 102–107, who uses them to reconstruct the milieu (for the date of 1490, p. 77). An account of Cortesi's Academy is also available in John F. D'Amico, "Humanism in Rome," in Rabil (ed.), *Renaissance Humanism*, vol. I, pp. 264–295, at 277–278.

⁵ See D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, p. 78. Peter Partner, *The Pope's Men: The Papal Civil Service in the Renaissance* (Oxford, 1990), p. 139, views Cortesi's decision to withdraw from papal service as an ill-advised way to amass patronage and casts it instead as an effective retirement. Paschini, "Una famiglia," p. 37, hypothesizes that Cortesi fled Rome after having incurred the disfavor of the volatile Cesare Borgia.

whereas he wrote his two other major works in the quiet of his Tuscan retreat. They were a piece of humanist theology with a standard scholastic name, the *Liber sententiarum* (1504), and an exposition of the Renaissance cardinalate, *De cardinalatu* (1510).⁶ Cortesi is best known today, however, for what he later considered juvenilia: his epistolary debate with Angelo Poliziano over the correct method of literary imitation, and specifically over the propriety of the exclusive imitation of Cicero.⁷ As is well known, Cortesi championed the cause of Ciceronianism, which Poliziano belittled as mindless “aping” and to which he counterposed his own characteristic eclecticism.⁸ The young Cortesi’s position was more sophisticated than Poliziano initially imagined (and than Erasmus would later caricature in his *Ciceronianus*), and in the sixteenth century it would be cited approvingly by Pietro Bembo for the benefit of his own Ciceronianism on the Latin side of the *questione della lingua*.⁹

It is in the aftermath and the context of this debate that Cortesi composed his dialogue *De hominibus doctis* (1489–1490).¹⁰ In reply to Poliziano,

⁶ On the *Liber sententiarum* see D’Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, *passim* but p. 78 for general comments and pp. 148–168 for analysis. An English translation (by William Felver) of the preface to the first book is available in Leonard A. Kelley (ed.), *Renaissance Philosophy: New Translations* (The Hague, 1973), pp. 32–36. There is no modern printed edition. On *De cardinalatu* see D’Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, *passim* but pp. 78–80 for general comments and pp. 227–237 for an in-depth analysis.

⁷ The Latin text and an English translation of the correspondence are available in *Ciceronian Controversies*, ed. JoAnn Dellaneva, tr. Brian Duvick (Cambridge, Mass., 2007), pp. 2–15, otherwise in Latin with Italian translation in Eugenio Garin (ed.), *Prosatori Latini del Quattrocento* (Milan, 1952), pp. 902–911. Many scholars have written on this famous debate, but an exceptionally full treatment of the two humanists’ theory and practice of imitation is provided by McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation*, ch. 10: “The Dispute between Poliziano and Cortesi,” pp. 187–227. For a different view of the matter, see Vincenzo Fera, “Il problema dell’imitatio tra Poliziano e Cortesi,” in Vincenzo Fera and Augusto Guida (eds.), *Vetustatis indagator. Scritti offerti a Filippo Benedetto* (Messina, 1999), pp. 155–181. For broader treatments of Ciceronianism and humanist disputes over imitation in Latin style, see Christopher S. Celenza, “End Game: Humanist Latin in the Late Fifteenth Century,” in *Latinitas Perennis*, vol. II: *Appropriation and Latin Literature* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 201–242; D’Ascia, *Erasmus e l’Umanesimo romano*, ch. 4: “La polemica sull’imitazione nell’umanesimo italiano” (pp. 105–160); and Marc Fumaroli, *L’Âge de l’éloquence: rhétorique et “res literaria,” de la Renaissance au seuil de l’époque classique* (Geneva, 1980), esp. pp. 77–230. Cortesi described his letter to Poliziano as “youthful” in his later *De cardinalatu* (Castrum Cortesium, 1510), p. lxxxv: “non tam videri maturitate potest quam aetatis spe et ingenii significatione grandis” (cited in Ferraù, “Introduzione,” p. 44, n. 63). For Poliziano, philologist extraordinaire and intimate of Lorenzo de’ Medici, see Vittore Branca, *Poliziano e l’umanesimo della parola* (Milan, 1952); and for more recent literature: Vincenzo Fera and Mario Martelli (eds.), *Agnolo Poliziano: poeta, scrittore, filologo* (Florence, 1998).

⁸ For Ciceronianism in Rome, see D’Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 123–134.

⁹ Cf. Celenza, “End Game,” pp. 201–212.

¹⁰ The date of *DHD* is still not certain. See Ferraù, “Nota al testo,” pp. 61–64, and the less precise considerations in Graziosi, “Introduzione,” pp. xxi–xxii. The date of Cortesi’s exchange with Poliziano is equally uncertain. It is usually put at the end of the 1480s, but McLaughlin (*Literary*

Cortesi had defended the exclusive imitation of Cicero as the only sure way to achieve a correct style. Now he developed his position further, elaborating a theory of stylistic imitation and meaningful expression that posited a dynamic relationship between *ars*, i.e., the rules that govern proper speech and the knowledge of them, and imitation of the most excellent model(s).¹¹ In short, imitation was still the key to stylistic excellence, but it could not be done properly without knowledge of what was good and bad, proper and improper, i.e., without *ars*.¹² This was no idle theory but rather a model that explained for Cortesi the fifteenth-century revival of classical Latin eloquence, so much of whose *ars* had been lost since antiquity. And this is precisely the theme of *De hominibus doctis*. In the dialogue Cortesi traces the historical development of humanism, which in his eyes had been devoted primarily to eloquence and had progressed in time via the gradual recovery of the *ars* of rhetoric and corresponding improvements in proper stylistic imitation.¹³ *De hominibus doctis* is itself an emblematic act of imitation, namely of Cicero's dialogue *Brutus*, which traces the development of Greek and Roman eloquence in antiquity by means of a register and critique of its major representatives.¹⁴ In his own work, Cortesi charts the humanists' progress in reviving and progressing towards the old Latin eloquence in modern times, judging them, by the standard of Cicero, ever more positively as they approach his own generation.¹⁵

De hominibus doctis takes the form of a dramatic dialogue. As in its model, Cicero's *Brutus*, one authoritative speaker, here "a certain Antonio," holds forth while two minor characters, Paolo Cortesi himself and his close

Imitation, p. 202) has argued for an earlier date of 1485, which is accepted in *Ciceronian Controversies*, p. vii. Some scholars believe that *DHD* predates the epistolary debate with Poliziano: see Fera, "Il problema"; Monfasani, "Puzzling Dates," pp. 92–97; Piero Floriani, Review of Cortesi, *De hominibus doctis dialogus*, ed. Graziosi (1973), *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 152 (1975), pp. 148–152; and Weiss, "Cortesi, Paolo," p. 56.

¹¹ A different view is taken by Black, "New Laws," p. 135, who claims that Cortesi had "rejected his original position on imitation . . . when he wrote *De hominibus doctis*" and that "Cortesi's views have changed since his original dispute with Poliziano." It seems rather more correct to say that Cortesi added several levels of sophistication to his original position, but not that it is repudiated in *DHD*. I agree with Black, though, that there was a greater affinity between Cortesi and Poliziano than is usually recognized (pp. 132–140), and also that Cortesi was influenced by Poliziano's critique in the further development of his own ideas (p. 136).

¹² For a slightly different interpretation, see D'Ascia, *Erasmus e l'Umanesimo romano*, pp. 117–124.

¹³ On the historical nature of Cortesi's dialogue, see Baker, "Writing History in Cicero's Shadow."

¹⁴ For Cortesi's adaptation of the *Brutus* and of *DHD*'s relationship to Cicero in general, see Ferratù, "Introduzione," pp. 9–17.

¹⁵ An appreciation for irony demands citing, in light of Cortesi's program of judging all the important humanists of the fifteenth century, a passage from his letter to Poliziano: "I too am the sort of person, as Cicero says, who would not wish to judge another, even if I could, nor could I, even if I wanted to" (*Ciceronian Controversies*, p. 7).

friend Alessandro Farnese, the future Pope Paul III, play supporting roles.¹⁶ (For purposes of clarity, from now on the character of Paolo Cortesi in the dialogue will be referred to as Paolo, the author as Cortesi.) The job of these lesser characters is to agree or to disagree, to interject their own opinions or to ask questions, or sometimes just to move the discussion along after it gets bogged down in digressions – all of which is aimed at making the dialogue lively and giving it the feel of a real-life conversation. The dialogue is set on an island in Lago di Bolsena, in the territory of the Farnese, where a group of young men from Rome has come to engage in learned conversation.¹⁷ After touching on various topics including the beauty of the setting and the greatness of Alessandro's ancestors, the group falls into a discussion about "who exactly it was whose minds roused our studies from their sleep." Antonio, who is a bit older than the others and who has introduced the topic of "men of all kinds of learning," is chosen to "set forth what he thinks about them."¹⁸

Although the references to "our studies" (*studia*) and "men of all kinds of learning" (*multi omni genere doctrinae*), as well as others that crop up like "learned studies" (*studia doctrinae*),¹⁹ at first appear rather generic, the precise theme quickly materializes when Paolo says, "I especially admire those men whose efforts opened the way to eloquence. So, Antonio, . . . it would greatly please us to hear what you think *de hominibus doctis*" – about these learned men.²⁰ Antonio later sums up his task as follows: "So, you are asking me to judge and describe those who are considered well spoken and who have done the most to achieve some praise for eloquence."²¹ Who

¹⁶ The precise identity of Antonius remains unknown (Cortesi, *DHD*, 103.23: "quendam Antonium"), which for our purposes does not matter. Vladimir Zabughin, *Giulio Pomponio Leto: saggio critico*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1909–1912), vol. I, pp. 82 and 209, identifies Antonio as Antonio Augusto Baldo (or Valdo), whereas Graziosi, "Introduzione," pp. xxiii–xxiv, identifies him instead with Giovanni Antonio Sulpizio da Veroli. Ferraù, "Introduzione," p. 9, accepts Zabughin's identification, but D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 77 and 267, n. 67, agrees with Graziosi; neither justifies his preference. For Alessandro Farnese, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 103.18–20: "Alexander Farnesius, adolescens . . . summa mecum benevolentia coniunctus"; and Rosemary Devonshire Jones, "Paul III," in Peter G. Bietenholz and Thomas B. Deutscher (eds.), *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation*, 3 vols. (Toronto, 2003), vol. III, pp. 53–56. In Cicero's *Brutus* the supporting roles are played by Cicero's friend Atticus and protégé Brutus.

¹⁷ Information on the setting and the circumstances of the dialogue is gathered from the dedicatory letter, 103.10–104.3, and from the dialogue itself, 105.1–107.13.

¹⁸ Cortesi, *DHD*, 103.22–25: "quinam essent hi, quorum ingenis sunt sopita studia excitavit, rogavimus omnes Antonium . . . ut . . . quid de his viris sentiret explicaret"; "men of all kinds of learning": 106.14–15 ("multi omni genere doctrinae floruerunt").

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.12.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.17–20: "hos etiam amo, quorum industria sunt nobis aditus ad eloquentiam patefacti. Sed quoniam, Antoni, . . . erit nobis pergratum si de his doctis hominibus quid sentias explicabis."

²¹ *Ibid.*, 107.8–10: "Quaeritis igitur quanti et quales in disertorum numero habiti sint et qui mihi ad aliquam eloquentiae laudem maxime accessisse videantur."

are these well-spoken *homines docti*? None other than all the great figures in the humanist movement from 1400 to 1480, as well as, perhaps, Dante, Petrarch, and other forerunners.²² Cortesi in no uncertain terms conceives of humanism as the movement to restore eloquence, and he equates the efforts to revive eloquence with the history of humanism.

That humanism must be understood more precisely as the movement to restore *Ciceronian* eloquence is nowhere stated explicitly in the dialogue, but such can be inferred from several factors. First, Cortesi's reputation as a Ciceronian was second to none.²³ It is true that later in life, as can be seen in his *De cardinalatu*, Cortesi appears to have moved away from the strict Ciceronianism of his youth.²⁴ Nevertheless, it is precisely this style that characterizes *De hominibus doctis* and that won it praise from one of the other great Ciceronians in Rome, Adriano Castellesi.²⁵ Furthermore, as mentioned above, this dialogue appeared directly after the exchange with Poliziano and acted as a theoretical expansion of the position taken there. Accordingly, many of the most important passages from the letter to Poliziano are integrated, often verbatim, into *De hominibus doctis*.²⁶ Finally, as Martin McLaughlin has noted, "The *De Hominibus Doctis* represents the application of Ciceronian standards to the Latin of Quattrocento humanists."²⁷ Not only is Cicero the implicit touchstone of good Latin,

²² Ferraù, "Introduzione," p. 38, notes that "non un nome di quelli che pure hanno rilievo in una odierna prospettiva viene trascurato." The exception is the great Florentine humanists of Lorenzo de' Medici's circle, whose absence is in part explained by Cortesi's decision not to treat contemporaries, in part by a subtle polemic against their particular brand of humanism. See below, pp. 166–167.

²³ Martin McLaughlin (*Literary Imitation*, pp. 202–206, 217–227) has revised the general view of Cortesi as a "reactionary Ciceronian," by which is meant someone who thinks Cicero must be imitated in every way and is "the sole source of Latin diction" (p. 217). Such, he notes, is "an extreme position that belongs to the sixteenth not the fifteenth century" (p. 217). Cortesi's position, on the contrary, is that Cicero is the best author and thus the only one to be imitated in the development of one's own style, but that the proper imitator does not resemble the object of his imitation in the manner of Poliziano's ape but rather as a son does a father, resembling him in many ways but still retaining his own essence. McLaughlin emphasizes that Cortesi shared the goal of self-expression with Poliziano and that the two only disagreed on the means to achieving it, Poliziano favoring eclecticism, Cortesi Ciceronianism. On the nature of Cortesi's Ciceronianism, see also the brief but insightful remarks in John Monfasani, "The Ciceronian Controversy," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. III, pp. 395–401, at 396.

²⁴ See D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 79–80, and McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation*, pp. 224–226. Black's characterization of an outright rejection ("New Laws," p. 135) seems too strong. There is, however, more support for his position in Ferraù, "Il problema," pp. 178–181.

²⁵ See Paschini, "Una famiglia," p. 29; D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 132–133; and Ferraù's *apparatus fontium* in Cortesi, *DHD*, which records the imitation and adaptation of Cicero's rhetorical works and speeches in nearly every sentence. Although the modern Latinist might find the imitation less than perfect, contemporaries were convinced of its success. Cf. the praise offered by Lucio Fosforo in a congratulatory letter: "apparet te in legendo Cicerone operam non amisisse, ita eum effinxisti, ipsum certe audire videor" (in Cortesi, *DHD*, 99.4–6).

²⁶ See Ferraù, "Introduzione," pp. 44–46.

²⁷ McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation*, p. 217.

he is also held up several times as a model for stylistic imitation in the dialogue; indeed, his is nearly the only ancient name explicitly mentioned in this connection, and the most highly valued.²⁸

Before continuing to an analysis of the dialogue, two words about its curious *fortuna* might be of interest. Cortesi was evidently proud of his *opus*, dedicating it to no less prominent a patron than Lorenzo il Magnifico, clients of whom the Cortesi family had long been, and submitting it to the approval of the same Poliziano who had so recently rebuked him.²⁹ Poliziano's response was short but approving, and the work received high praise from several other prominent individuals.³⁰ It failed, however, to secure the patronage Cortesi sought from Lorenzo de' Medici. Then it suddenly and inexplicably disappeared, suppressed by the author himself after its initial circulation among friends, colleagues, and potential patrons.³¹ Cortesi apparently continued to polish it over the years, and several of its judgments were integrated into the later *De cardinalatu*. Yet *De hominibus doctis* remained unknown and was not destined to see the light of day again until its discovery at the end of the seventeenth century, when it was diffused rapidly in Florence and elsewhere; it was first printed in 1734.³²

The investigation that follows is divided into three parts, each dealing with a different aspect of Cortesi's conception of humanism. The first traces the history of the movement as outlined through the course of the dialogue, illustrating and explaining Cortesi's periodization of the movement and its progress through the contributions of important individuals. The second section distills the elements that, in Cortesi's view, made up

²⁸ As a stylist to be imitated, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 121.4–5, 135.8–136.2, 172.11–13; the latter two passages emphasize the difficulty of the proper imitation of Cicero. The only other ancients mentioned for style are Livy, who is ranked lower than Cicero: "in his *History* [Bruni] strives after a Livian kind of style; I would not dare call it Ciceronian" (121.4–5: "Consectatur in historia quiddam Livianum, non ausim dicere Ciceronianum"); and Plautus, in imitation of whom Antonio Beccadelli is said to have failed (145.3–5).

²⁹ See Ferrau, "Introduzione," pp. 41–42.

³⁰ Poliziano's epistolary reaction to the dialogue is printed in Cortesi, *DHD*, 99.14–100.3. Black, "New Laws," pp. 138–139, demonstrates that Poliziano was even influenced by Cortesi, regarding the need for an *ars historica*, in the opening lecture to his 1490–1491 course on Suetonius. Cortesi's work was approved by Cardinal Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini and Adriano Castellesi. See Paschini, "Una famiglia," pp. 28–29, and Ferrau, "Nota al testo," pp. 62–64.

³¹ For a theory on why Cortesi decided not to publish his dialogue, see Monfasani, "Puzzling Dates," pp. 95–97.

³² See Ferrau, "Introduzione," pp. 65–67. The first edition was Paolo Cortesi, *De hominibus doctis dialogus nunc primum in lucem editus* [...] *cum adnotationibus. Accedit auctoris vita* (Florence, 1734) [reprinted in Filippo Villani, *Liber de civitatis Florentiae famosis civibus*, ed. Gustavo Camillo Galletti (Florence, 1847), pp. 215–284].

a general humanist profile and constituted the humanist milieu. Finally, a third section describes the larger cultural meaning and significance Cortesi attributed to humanism, showing that the restoration of eloquence was no mere matter of taste.

From *homines docti* to *oratores*

Cortesi divides his historical account of humanism's restoration of Ciceronian Latin into four distinct (albeit slightly overlapping) periods corresponding to chronological development and stylistic improvement: (1) fourteenth-century forerunners of humanism beginning with Dante; (2) the first phase of true humanism, from roughly 1400 through the third quarter of the century, from Leonardo Bruni to Platina; (3) a second, later phase represented substantially by Roman humanists, roughly 1460–1490;³³ (4) his own contemporaries.³⁴ Of these the second period is given the most attention (it constitutes about three-quarters of the whole text) and contains the most detailed treatment; it provides nearly all of the information on humanism's historical development. The first period, on the contrary, is presented as an afterthought, with Antonio urged by Alessandro to go back and say what he thinks about Dante and Petrarch after he has already begun with fifteenth-century figures.³⁵ The third period is dealt with quickly and rather superficially. The fourth is not directly described at all, as Antonio

³³ See Ferraù, "Introduzione," pp. 38–39.

³⁴ It is tempting to make both more and less of these divisions, but ultimately they are the ones indicated by Cortesi. One could make more by trying to discover a more subtle breakdown in the second period. Antonio often treats humanists in mini-groups that seem to cohere according to geography, occupation, or shared period of flourishing, and a general chronological flow from Bruni to Platina is obvious (according to geography, e.g., the series Manetti–Alberti–Palla Strozzi–Benedetto Accolti–Poggio is related to Florence; according to occupation, e.g., the series George of Trebizond–Pomponio Leto–Antonio Loschi–Vittorino da Feltre–Gasparino Barzizza–Ognibene da Lonigo–Lorenzo Valla embraces teachers; according to floruit, e.g., the observations that Boccaccio was "about ten years younger than Petrarch" (Cortesi, *DHD*, 115.7–116.1: "Ioannes Boccaccius, sed decennio fere minor quam Petrarcha"), and "Guarino was a contemporary of Bruni" (122.1–2: "Leonardi igitur fere aequalis fuit Guarinus Veronensis, doctus magister"). Yet such groupings are desultory, irregular, and inconsistent, and ultimately Antonio must be taken at his word when he begs "for indulgence if chronological order is not observed, since all the humanists lived at about the same time and were more or less contemporaries, and since their life spans in large part overlapped" (117.1–4: "quoniam uno tempore omnes ac prope aequales fuerunt multique sunt multorum aetatibus implicati, dabitur veniam si minus aetatum ordines servabuntur"). One could also make less of this periodization by observing that nothing substantial seems to separate the second from the third period and that some of their members overlap chronologically. Nevertheless, Antonio clearly indicates a historical break (167.11–12: "sed iam ad inferiorem, si placet, aetatem veniamus"), and thus Cortesi apparently wants these humanists, predominantly figures related to Pomponio Leto's academy in Rome, treated as a case apart.

³⁵ See Cortesi, *DHD*, 113.5–13.

refuses to discuss his contemporaries;³⁶ nevertheless, some of its salient characteristics can be reconstructed from comments made throughout the text. Cortesi characterizes each of these periods by describing the contributions of singular individuals to particular themes, especially the recovery of general canons of style, the growing ability to imitate Cicero, and the revival of ancient literary genres that had been lost in the Middle Ages.

In the words of Cortesi's Antonio, humanism has its origins in an age completely bereft of eloquence, in the "dregs of all time" when the "ornaments of writing were absent" and "eloquence had utterly lost its voice."³⁷ This period brought forth famous works of literature, but none attained to the standards and achievements of true eloquence. Enter Dante, whose "famous poem" testifies to his "incredibly great talent" and to the "wonder" of his "daring to treat such difficult and abstruse subjects in the vernacular." In one sense he was eloquent: "it is unbelievable how ardent and forcible he was in persuading and moving." And yet he did not possess the proper linguistic skills: "if only he had excelled as highly in committing his thoughts to Latin literature as he did in spreading the renown of his mother tongue."³⁸ Dante was no humanist. Enter Petrarch, "whose intelligence and industry is proven by his large number of books." Unfortunately, "his style is not really Latin and is sometimes downright frightful. His thoughts are many but disjointed, the words are cast down at random, and everything is composed rather more diligently than elegantly."³⁹

Nevertheless, Petrarch, as opposed to Dante, was able to play a foundational role for humanism (in a manner similar to that found in Piccolomini and Biondo):

He possessed such a great abundance of talent and memory that he was the first to dare to call the pursuit of eloquence (*studia eloquentiae*) back to light:

³⁶ For Antonio's refusal, which he justifies by the lateness of the hour but which Alessandro and Paolo ascribe to other motives, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 185.2–187.4. Four living humanists are, however, treated in the text: Pomponio Leto, Giovanni Pontano, Ermolao Barbaro, and Giorgio Merula. For the significance of their inclusion, see Ferraù, "Introduzione," pp. 38–54, esp. 53–54, and below, pp. 166–167.

³⁷ Cortesi, *DHD*, 114.20–115.1: "in faece omnium saeculorum . . . illa scribendi ornamenta defuerunt"; 107.11: "ita reperiam eloquentiam obmutuisse."

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.14–114.8: "praeclarum eius poema plane bene indicat incredibile ingenii magnitudinem. Mirabile illud certe fuit, quod res tam difficiles tamque abstrusas vulgari sermone auderet explicare . . . In permovendo autem et incitando non est credibile quam sit concitatus et vehemens. Utinam tam bene cogitationes suas Latinis litteris mandare potuisset, quam bene patrium sermonem illustravit."

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.9–14: "cuius de ingenio industriaque ex tam multis eius libris existimari potest. . . Huius sermo nec est Latinus et aliquando horridior; sententiae autem multae sunt sed concisae, verba abiecta, res compositae diligentius quam elegantius."

for Italy was first enlivened, and equally *persuaded* and *moved* to this pursuit by the affluence of his ability.⁴⁰

Like Dante, Petrarch possessed the rhetorician's signature capacity to persuade (*impellere*) the mind and to move (*incitare*) the emotions or passions, but he lacked the proper language for real eloquence: "His vernacular poetry shows how much this man could have achieved with his talent, if only he had possessed the glory and magnificence of Latin." His works can be recommended for their usefulness (*utilitas*) rather than for pleasure (*delectatio*); they are like "strong medicine, taken not because it is sweet but because it is healthy." Ultimately, though, "they please somehow despite their inelegance," and Petrarch is "held in high honor for his broad knowledge and his reputation for native intelligence."⁴¹ Petrarch, therefore, but not Dante, is a kind of spiritual father of humanism; he cannot himself be considered a true humanist, but he gave impetus to the movement through his inspirational message, through his overwhelming desire for the ancient eloquence he was unable to achieve.

Petrarch's immediate successors did not move beyond his accomplishment. Boccaccio's "most remarkable intelligence" was "oppressed" by the "fatal evil" of his style, and "Giovanni [Conversini] da Ravenna and Coluccio Salutati, who never managed to rid themselves of harsh and gloomy language, can be judged similarly."⁴² Antonio notes that Boccaccio's *De genealogia deorum* is still read, since "it is useful, but it cannot be compared to Petrarch's ability." On the other hand Giovanni's *Dialogues* "can barely

⁴⁰ Ibid., II.4.14–17: "Fuit in illo ingenii atque memoriae tanta magnitudo ut primus ausus sit eloquentiae studia in lucem revocare: nam huius ingenii affluentia primum Italia exhilarata et tanquam ad studia impulsa atque incensa est" (emphasis mine). As for Piccolomini, the model for Cortesi here might be Leonardo Bruni. Cf. Bruni's *Vite di Dante e del Petrarca* in Bruni, *Opere letterarie e politiche*, pp. 537–557, at 555–556. See also Chapter 1 above, note 19.

⁴¹ Cortesi, *DHD*, II.4.18–II.5.6: "Declarant eius rhythmī, qui in vulgus feruntur, quantum ille vir consequi potuisset ingenio, si Latini sermonis lumen et splendor affuisset . . . Sed, ut saluberrimae potiones non suavitatis sed sanitatis causa dantur, sic eo non est delectatio petenda sed transferenda utilitas, quanquam omnia eius, nescio quo pacto, sic inornata delectant. Huic ob multarum rerum doctrinam et ingenii famam honores amplissimi habiti sunt."

⁴² Ibid., II.6.1–10: "huius etiam praeclarissimi ingenii cursum fatale illud malum oppressit . . . Eodemque modo de Ioanne Ravennate et Coluccio Salutato iudicare licet, qui nunquam etiam ab orationis asperitate moestitiaque abesse potuerunt." The identification of Giovanni da Ravenna with Conversini and not Malpaghini follows Witt, *Footsteps*, pp. 339–346. On Giovanni Conversini, a teacher and author of many works including short treatises, an autobiography (*Rationarium vitae*), and a dialogue on political philosophy (*Dragnalogia*), see Benjamin Kohl, "Conversini (Conversano, Conversino), Giovanni (Giovanni da Ravenna)," in *DBI*, vol. XXVIII (1983), pp. 574–578.

be read through even once,” and Salutati’s letters, “which used to be held in honor, are not in circulation.”⁴³

The position taken (sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly) in all three authors in Chapter 1, and then combatted by Manetti, is here restated and expounded: no Trecento figure, not even Salutati, achieved the Latin style necessary to be worthy of the title of humanist. A similar stance will be taken implicitly by Sabellico in Chapter 4. Few aspects of the texts under consideration in this study could be more surprising to us. Scholars have long been unsure what to call the forerunners of Petrarch in Padua and elsewhere, men like Lovato dei Lovati and Albertino Mussato. Whereas most prefer the designation “prehumanist” or “proto-humanist,” Roberto Weiss and Ronald Witt have insisted on calling them humanists proper.⁴⁴ Here we see, instead, that, outside of Florence, humanists tended to think of Petrarch as the “prehumanist,” whereas they neglected his ancestors and direct heirs altogether. This turn of events has been attributed, at least with regard to Petrarch, largely to the change in taste evident in the circle around Leonardo Bruni and its subsequent polemic against Petrarch’s Latin.⁴⁵ However steadfastly Manetti struggled to keep this rising tide of anti-Petrarchan sentiment from sweeping the rest of Italy, Cortesi’s *De hominibus doctis* shows how little effect he had.⁴⁶

Echoing Piccolomini, Biondo, and Facio, Cortesi claims that true humanism only began with assistance from outside Italy, in the form of a teacher who could help the Italians overcome the inherited roughness of their style: Manuel Chrysoloras. Through his teaching Chrysoloras managed to turn the longing for eloquence inspired by Petrarch into, if not eloquence proper, then the true beginning of such:

After the studies of the greatest arts had lain so long, sorrowful and alone, in mourning, everyone knows that Chrysoloras the Byzantine brought the teaching of them to Italy from beyond the sea. Under his tutelage the Italians, once completely lacking in practice and *ars*, learned Greek and applied themselves earnestly to the pursuit of eloquence.⁴⁷

⁴³ Cortesi, *DHD*, 121.14–18: “*Dialogi* Ioannis Ravennatis vix semel leguntur et Coluccii *Epistolae*, quae tum in honore erant, non apparent; sed Boccaccii *Deorum Genealogiam* legimus, utilem illam quidem, sed non tamen cum Petrarchae ingenio conferendam.”

⁴⁴ See Witt, *Footsteps*, pp. 18–19.

⁴⁵ See Hankins, “Petrarch and the Canon of Neo-Latin Literature.”

⁴⁶ Incidentally, Cortesi’s characterization of Petrarch’s works as useful and medicinal might also indicate that another of Hankins’ findings (see previous note), namely that Petrarch’s fame outside of Italy rested on his status as a moral philosopher, might apply inside Italy as well.

⁴⁷ Cortesi, *DHD*, 111.8–13: “Nam posteaquam maximarum artium studia tam diu in sordibus aegra desertaque iacuerunt, satis constat Grisoloram Bisantium transmarinam illam disciplinam in Italiam

As we saw in Chapter 1, attributing the revival of Latin eloquence to Chrysoloras was common among Quattrocento humanists, who, however, tended not to explain the mechanism at work. Antonio is not as explicit as we might like, but he does hint, along Biondo's lines, that the mechanism had to do with Chrysoloras' students' translation and imitation of Greek works, especially historiography, hailed here and elsewhere as "the single greatest rhetorical genre."⁴⁸

There was, however, something more fundamental. As Antonio explains a bit later, in a digression aimed at establishing the proper relationship between *ars* and *imitatio*:

without theoretical knowledge (*artificium*) we just as easily strive after vice as virtue in our imitation . . . For no one is so full of natural ability and so diligent in imitation as to be able to compose well without knowledge of the *ars* of speech.⁴⁹

This had been the stumbling block for Petrarch and the other forerunners of humanism, who in their imitation of the ancients could not distinguish between *usus* and *abusus*. It was this sensitivity that Chrysoloras provided. He was no mere language teacher in the strict sense, but rather an authority on the theory, the *ars* behind the stylistic eloquence that was a common hallmark of the ancient Greek and Latin literary traditions. This explanation resembles somewhat the one provided by Christine Smith, who likewise argues that Chrysoloras provided the humanists with the conceptual and theoretical tools they had hitherto lacked.⁵⁰ In her estimation, however, Chrysoloras' contribution consisted essentially in teaching humanists how to "transfer . . . master terms and concepts" from one branch of knowledge to another. She argues that humanists adopted from Chrysoloras the "decompartmentalization of knowledge characteristic of Byzantine learning," which "emphasized the relations, rather than the distinctions, between branches of human learning, fostering the formation of the cultivated generalist . . . rather than the narrow specialist or professional." Smith concludes that "this method placed an abundance of new

advexisse; quo doctore adhibito primum nostri homines totius exercitationis atque artis ignari, cognitis Graecis litteris, vehementer sese ad eloquentiae studia excitaverunt."

⁴⁸ Ibid., 113.1–3: "incredibile eorum studium fuit in scribendis vertendisque ex Graecis in Latinum sermonem historiis. Sed cum historia munus sit unum vel maximum oratorium." This is an echo of Cicero, *De oratore*, 2, 15, 62: "Videtisne quantum munus sit oratoris historia? Haud scio an flumine orationis et varietate maximum." See note 116 below.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 120.3–9: "sine artificio tam facile possumus vitia quam virtutes imitando consecrari . . . Nulli est enim tanta ubertas ingenii, nulli tam diligens imitandi industria quam sine huius [sc. disserendi] artis ratione bene disposita ac praeclare inventa possit effingere."

⁵⁰ Smith, *Architecture in the Culture of Early Humanism*, pp. 133–149. See also Chapter 1, note 17.

terms, categories, and concepts in the hands of Italian humanists, which they were free to apply to the subjects that interested them.”⁵¹ Smith may be correct about the benefits of this aspect of Byzantine education, but it is clearly not what Cortesi had in mind, nor is it, in my opinion, likely to be what Guarino and others appreciated so much about their beloved teacher.⁵² Cortesi shows concern not for the ability to speak in general terms about a wide variety of subjects but rather for the very ability to speak eloquently, regardless of the subject. What hindered Petrarch was not overspecialization but rather ignorance of what makes certain word combinations sound good and others not. He did not know which authors and passages were worth imitating in which circumstances. In Cortesi’s view, Chrysoloras acted as the guide to proper composition, illuminating for Petrarch’s heirs the distinction between “virtuous” and “vicious” imitation. This marked the true starting point of humanism, whose development consisted in the steady recovery of the “*ars* of speech” and the increasingly correct application of this *ars* to the imitation of the best model, Cicero.

With Chrysoloras’ students begins Cortesi’s second period, whose first and greatest representative is Leonardo Bruni.⁵³ According to Antonio, “he was the first to reform the uncouth method of writing, giving it a rhythmic kind of sound, and he provided humanists with something really quite brilliant.”⁵⁴ Bruni is praised generally for his style and specifically for his orations and translations, but above all for his revival of the ancient genre of funeral oratory and his historiography.⁵⁵ Regarding his excellence in the latter, Bruni is judged “easily to tower over all who came after him.”⁵⁶

Yet Bruni’s reputation is not nearly as pristine here as it was in Biondo’s or Facio’s work, and even Piccolomini’s awareness of Bruni’s limitations pales in comparison to the harsher criticism of him that apparently marked Cortesi’s time. Referring to current dissatisfaction with Bruni, Antonio notes, “I see that he is no longer refined enough, nor is he acceptable

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 137.

⁵² Cf. Witt, *Footsteps*, p. 343, n. 14, for similar skepticism about Smith’s explanation.

⁵³ For Bruni, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 117.7–118.13, 120.21–121.26, and 185.21–22.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 117.8–118.2: “hic primus inconditam scribendi consuetudinem ad numerosum quendam sonum inflexit et attulit hominibus nostris aliquid certe splendidius.” Cortesi might be referring to prose rhythm, an issue that he discusses at length elsewhere in *DHD*. See below, note 81.

⁵⁵ It has been argued that funeral oratory was actually first revived by Pier Paolo Vergerio, not Bruni. See McManamon, *Funeral Oratory*, p. 10; and McManamon, *Pierpaolo Vergerio the Elder*, esp. p. 39. Witt, however, disagrees and gives Vergerio’s style a poor evaluation. See Witt, *Footsteps*, pp. 371–372, n. 91, and 377–381. On Bruni as an historian, see the recent synthesis by Gary Ianziti, *Writing History in Renaissance Italy: Leonardo Bruni and the Uses of the Past* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012).

⁵⁶ Cortesi, *DHD*, 121.7–8: “omnibus, mea sententia, qui post eum fuerunt, facile praestiterit.”

to a more delicate palate.” And Alessandro adds, “I have always praised Leonardo as learned and eloquent and the prince of his age. But you know how humanists are nowadays, praising nothing unless it is cultivated, elegant, polished, ornate.”⁵⁷ Nevertheless, it is agreed that Bruni represents a major advance with respect to his predecessors.⁵⁸

After Bruni comes Guarino Veronese, who is treated in a similar manner: first praise for what he has done, then criticism.⁵⁹ In this case Guarino’s high reputation rests entirely on his activity as a teacher: “His home was like a kind of workshop of the *bonae artes*,” and “just about everyone who achieved some fame for writing in that age acknowledged himself a product of his school.”⁶⁰ Guarino’s writings, however, do not recommend him nearly as highly. In addition to relating George of Trebizond’s criticism of Guarino’s style – “abrupt and juvenile” – Antonio reports the view that “Guarino would have helped his reputation if he had written nothing at all; . . . his writings not only do his name no honor, they continually diminish it.” Nevertheless Antonio ultimately defends Guarino’s Latin as possessing “a certain *gravitas*,” saying, “if he did not achieve perfect eloquence (whose form he saw as if through a fog), he is at least worthy of some praise for his writings.”⁶¹

Thus the dialogue continues, praising, critiquing, and comparing humanists, all the while noting their contributions to the *ars* of speech. Other teachers like Vittorino da Feltre and Gasparino Barzizza are mentioned besides Guarino, but it is George of Trebizond who stands out for Cortesi as the next great instructor in the precepts, the *artificium*, of

⁵⁷ Ibid., 121.13–14: “Et ego video hunc nondum satis esse limatum nec delicatiori fastidio tolerabilem”; 121.23–26: “Sane quidem semper Leonardum ut doctum hominem, ut eloquentem, ut illius aetatis principem laudavi. Sed nosti morem nostrorum hominum, qui nihil nisi excultum, nisi elegans, nisi politum, nisi pictum probant.”

⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, 121.14–22. According to Black, “New Laws,” p. 142, “Cortesi damned . . . Leonardo Bruni . . . with faint praise.” In my view, however, the praise is not faint but rather relative, and in the context of the dialogue as a whole there does not seem to be any reason to take the positive assessment of Bruni as anything but genuine, esp. considering the fact that Bruni is listed at the end of the dialogue as one of the four greatest humanists of the fifteenth century (see below, p. 153).

⁵⁹ For Guarino, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 122.1–123.16.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 122.4–5: “huius domus quasi officina quaedam fuit bonarum artium”; 122.12–15: “ut omnes fere illius aetatis, qui aliquam sunt scribendi laudem consequuti, sese omnino faterentur ex huius hominis umbraculis . . . profectos” (the line numbers are incorrect on this page of Ferrau’s ed., which gives 3–4 and 11–14, respectively, for these quotations).

⁶¹ Ibid., 123.2–16: “Hunc Georgius Trapezuntius exagitat ut prae fractum et in compositione puerilem. Memoria teneo quendam familiarem meum solitum dicere, melius Guarinum eius famae consuluisse si nihil umquam scripsisset; . . . non modo nomen eius non illustretur scriptis, sed etiam in dies magis obscuratur . . . nec temere Guarino gravitatem quandam in scribendo . . . adimo; . . . at laudandus est ut qui multum nostris hominibus profuerit et ut qui, si non perfectam eloquentiam (cuius speciem quasi per caliginem quandam viderat) at aliquam in scribendo laudem sit consequutus.”

eloquence.⁶² Once again, it is a Greek who brings to his Italian students the theoretical knowledge of eloquence, his own mastery of which is here attributed to his study of the Peripatetics, who “treat the art of speaking (*ratio dicendi*) more deeply than other philosophers.”⁶³ Lorenzo Valla is also given credit for making an important contribution to the broad diffusion of correct Latin with his teaching and writings.⁶⁴ An “expert on Roman history and lexicography,” Valla was “an incredibly learned writer whose sharpness of mind is generally agreed to have revived all of Italy.”⁶⁵ Nevertheless, he was “annoying and abusive” (*molestus . . . et stomachosus*), and, what is worse in Cortesi’s eyes, he did not achieve the highest style. For, although “Valla wrote so diligently about the proper use (*ratio*) of Latin vocabulary, he himself does not seem to have spoken Latin well enough.”⁶⁶ Antonio elaborates:

Writing and teaching rely on different principles. Valla tried to explain the meaning of words and to teach ways (although not correct ones) to structure speech, and he certainly cleaned up the polluted language of his time and improved his pupils. But there is a different way of writing, which Valla either disregarded or didn’t know. A fine, sweet, and incorrupt Latin style requires a certain cementing and grouping of words [i.e., periodic structure], by which *concinnitas* is produced with respect to sound.⁶⁷

⁶² For Vittorino, see *ibid.*, 140.6–141.2; for Barzizza, 141.2–5; for George, 139.17–23. For the possibility that the figure of “Gasparinus Veronensis” (141.2) is to be identified with Gaspare da Verona instead of Barzizza (who properly would be Bergomensis, not Veronensis), as well as the possibility that Cortesi simply conflates the two, see *ibid.*, pp. 141–142, n. 42.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 139.20–23: “adhibuit in scribendo illa adiumenta quae habuerat a Peripateticis, qui, praeter coeteros philosophos, rationem dicendi latioribus quibusdam praeceptis complectuntur.” Interestingly, Cortesi is the first humanist to make recourse to Aristotle in his theory of imitation, which he does in his letter to Poliziano (*Ciceronian Controversies*, pp. 10–12). See McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation*, p. 205, although Cortesi’s idea of art imitating nature has also been attributed to Seneca (*Ciceronian Controversies*, p. 237, n. 22).

⁶⁴ For Valla, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 142.5–144.20.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.5–7: “scriptor egregie doctus, cuius ingenii acumine constare inter omnes audio Italiam esse recreatam, sed erat acer et maledicus et toto genere paulo asperior, diligentissimus tamen Romanarum rerum atque verborum investigator.”

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.9–10: “molestus erat et stomachosus”; 144.6–10: “tam diligenter Valla de ratione verborum Latinorum scripserit, ipse non bene satis loqui Latine videatur.”

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.10–17: “Non est enim . . . eadem ratio scribendi quam praecipiendi. Conabatur Valla vim verborum exprimere et quasi vias (sed eas non rectas) tradebat ad structuram orationis, in quo tamen et inquinatam dicendi consuetudinem emendavit et multum acuit iuventutem. Sed est certe alia scribendi ratio quae a Valla aut praetermissa est aut ignorata. Florens enim ille et suavis et incorruptus Latinus sermo postulat sane conglutinationem et comprehensionem quandam verborum, quibus conficitur ipsa concinnitas ad sonum.” As if to emphasize that Cicero’s periodic style is meant, Cortesi silently quotes Cicero’s *Brutus* and *Orator* in his description. See Cortesi, *DHD*, p. 144, *apparatus fontium*.

Valla was famous for championing Quintilian over Cicero, so it should come as no surprise that he did not write in Ciceronian periods. To Cortesi's mind, however, Valla's preference was a mistake resulting from a lack of *ars*, which his age, despite its many advances, had not yet recovered.

The same difficulty, Cortesi argues, inhibited progress in the restoration of ancient literary genres. As noted above, Bruni is honored for reviving ancient funeral oratory and receives high marks as an historian. Nevertheless, "in history he strove after a Livian kind of style; I would not dare call it Ciceronian."⁶⁸ Biondo Flavio, the Quattrocento's other foremost historian, also comes in for criticism. Even though "he wrote many good works of history" and "excelled his contemporaries in invention," ultimately he "seems to be an example for others that they should write with greater *artificium* and in a better style."⁶⁹ Oratory suffered from the same lack of theoretical knowledge. Consider Poggio, who was "like the picture of eloquence for his times," and who "left orations that show his fluency and wondrous mental powers." Alas, "if he had had as much *artificium* in writing as natural ability, he surely would have attained more glory for speaking than all his contemporaries."⁷⁰ Similarly, Leonardo Giustinian's famous funeral oration for Carlo Zeno is criticized as "good but not noble enough in its language and relying more on a certain kind of *copia* than on an understanding of the rules of rhetoric (*oratorium artificium*).⁷¹ The fault is not Giustinian's but of his age, "which thought that eloquence in speech came from abundance, but did not know when enough was enough."⁷¹ Likewise in poetry.⁷² Antonio Beccadelli's achievement in reviving ancient

⁶⁸ Ibid., 121.4–5: "Consecatur in historia quiddam Livianum, non ausim dicere Ciceronianum."

⁶⁹ Ibid., 148.3–149.2: "prosequutus est historiam diligenter sane ac probe . . . Admonere enim reliquos videtur ut maiori artificio ac illustrioribus litteris historiam aggrediantur. In excogitando tamen quid scriberet omnibus his viris, qui fuerunt fere eius aequales meo quidem iudicio praestitit." The discussions of historiography in *De hominibus doctis* would themselves go on to spark humanist theorizing on historiography. See Cortesi, *DHD*, p. 138, n. 37; Black, "New Laws," p. 139; Patrick Baker, "Launching the *ars historica*: Paolo Cortesi's Dialogue with Cicero on Historiography," in Machtelt Israëls and Louis A. Waldman (eds.), *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Joseph Connors*, 2 vols. (Florence, 2013), vol. II, pp. 453–462; and Baker, "Writing History in Cicero's Shadow."

⁷⁰ For Poggio, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 135.3–136.6; quotations: "illis temporibus in Poggio Florentino quaedam species eloquentiae apparuit, in quo si tale artificium fuisset quale ingenium ad scribendum fuit, omnes profecto eius aequales dicendi gloria vicisset. Is orationes reliquit, quae et facundiam et mirificam ingenii facilitatem ostendunt."

⁷¹ Ibid., 129.4–7: "bona illa quidem sed non satis splendida verbis et quae magis copiam quam oratorium artificium prae se ferat. Nam haec aetas ponebat eloquentiam in orationis quadam abundantia nec plane cognovit quid esset satis." On the funeral oration for Carlo Zeno see McManamon, *Funeral Oratory*, pp. 88–91. For the Venetian patrician Giustinian, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 129.1–5 and King, *Venetian Humanism*, pp. 383–385, with further bibliography.

⁷² It is interesting that poets considered excellent by Facio only thirty years earlier – Loschi, Marrasio, Strozzi – are not even mentioned by Cortesi.

meters is recorded, but little progress seems to have been made thereafter. Indeed, the age could boast of few poets, so few, in fact, that even one as bad (in Antonio's estimation) as Porcellio could achieve the "highest popularity."⁷³ Chief among Porcellio's many faults, narrated here at length, was his lack of *varietas*, the metrical and stylistic variety that makes a collection of poems lively (since a constant meter and even style would otherwise lead to boredom).⁷⁴ Porcellio wrote Virgilian hexameters which "had nothing to recommend them but evenness." The problem was not Porcellio's alone, but rather of "his age," which "utterly lacked *varietas*."⁷⁵ Much worse, as can be gathered from the critique of Maffeo Vegio's "presumptuous" continuation of the *Aeneid*, the age also "lacked knowledge of the hidden *artificium*" of poetry, preferring instead to rely on "inspiration" (*vi naturae*).⁷⁶ Although the specific object of critique here is Vegio, Cortesi likely has in mind the Neoplatonic poetics being propounded in his own day in Florence by Cristoforo Landino and especially by Marsilio Ficino, who had famously declared that "poetry is not a product of *ars* but of some frenzy (*furor*)."⁷⁷

Yet progress in all these genres, as well as in general Latin style, can be perceived in other humanists starting around the middle of the century. Giovanni Pontano "first restored poetry to greater splendor and grasped metrical variety," and he was therefore "the prince of all the great humanists in this connection."⁷⁸ Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini distinguished himself in

⁷³ For Porcellio, a retainer of princes in Naples, Rimini, and Milan who was crowned poet laureate in 1452 by Frederick III, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 151.4–152.10. In addition to the bibliography provided by Ferrau in n. 57, see Ulrich Pfisterer, "Filaretos Künstlerwissen und der Wiederaufgefundene Traktat *De arte fluxoria* des Giannantonio Porcellio de' Pandoni," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 46 (2002), pp. 121–151; and Fedele Marletta, "Per la biografia di Porcelio dei Pandoni," *La Rinascita*, 3 (1940), pp. 842–881.

⁷⁴ For the meaning and importance of *varietas* in poetry, see Cortesi, *De hominibus doctis dialogus* (ed. Graziosi, 1973), p. 99, n. 88.

⁷⁵ Cortesi, *DHD*, 152.1–7: "ad summam nominis famam pervenerat; ex quo potest quanta tum fuerit ex omni numero poetarum paucitas. Exametri enim eius . . . nihilque afferant praeter aequalitatem. Caruit omnino varietate haec aetas."

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.6–8: "Audax iste . . . qui Maroni voluerit vicarius succedere"; 127.10–14: "Nam, cum poeta vi naturae inflammetur . . . cum . . . reconditum artificium non agnoscat." For the epic poet Vegio, who served in the curia of Eugenius IV as abbreviator and then datary, see *ibid.*, 127.2–8; and Michael J. Putnam's "Introduction," in Maffeo Vegio, *Short Epics*, ed. and tr. Michael J. Putnam, with James Hankins (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), pp. vii–lviii, esp. p. vii and the bibliography in n. 1.

⁷⁷ For Ficino and Landino as the targets of this polemic, see Ferrau, "Introduzione," pp. 46–53, esp. 51–52; Black, "New Laws," p. 136, n. 52, considers this notion "far-fetched." Ferrau cites Ficino on p. 47, from a letter to Baccio Ugolini, in Marsilio Ficino, *Opera* (Basilea, 1576), pp. 634–635: "... poesim non ab arte sed a furore aliquo proficisci."

⁷⁸ For Pontano, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 152.14–19; quotations from 152.14–17: "Modo enim hoc scribendi genus magnificentius renovatum est et cognita primum numerorum varietas a Pontano principe huius memoriae doctissimorum hominum."

oratory, history, and poetry and “could be called the only true humanist in this army of learned men.”⁷⁹ Antonio Campano was the first to have “a more flowery and brilliant kind of style.” His orations “are highly approved,” and his writing “seemed to flow as if composed according to a kind of rhythm.” Cortesi notes, however, that the restoration of rhythmic *clausulae* to Latin prose was not a result of theoretical knowledge but of Campano’s fortunate imitation of the right sources, “such that his speech had a very agreeable and rhythmical cadence.”⁸⁰ True understanding of prose rhythm, a topic that Cicero had treated at length in his *Orator* and that crops up several times in *De hominibus doctis*, would have to wait.⁸¹ Be that as it may, eloquence was moving forward. Several other individuals are singled out for the quality of their Latin style, such as the rival philologists Niccolò Perotti and Domizio Calderini, and extremely high praise is reserved for the Byzantine Theodore Gaza and for Cortesi’s former teacher Platina.⁸² Gaza was “the first to join the highest eloquence with the highest philosophy.” His life was so virtuous and his style so excellent that “he was rightly judged

⁷⁹ For Piccolomini, see *ibid.*, 153.5–154.8; quotation from 154.2–3: “Licet enim hunc prope solum oratorem ex hac acie doctorum adducere.” For the translation of *orator* as “true humanist” in this context, see the discussion on p. 154 below.

⁸⁰ For the Neapolitan Campano, professor of rhetoric in Perugia, member of the papal curia, and bishop of Crotone and then Teramo, see *ibid.*, 155.10–156.8; quotations: “Hoc in viro primum apparuit florentius ac splendidius quoddam orationis genus . . . Orationes autem eius valde probantur . . . Utebatur facili et ita candido quodam scribendi genere ut numeris quibusdam adstrictus fuere videatur; quamquam numerus orationis abest ingeniis nostris, ita tamen imitandi quadam industria orationem inflexerat ad sonum ut cadat plerumque iucunde et numerose.” In addition to the bibliography on p. 156, n. 62, see also Flavio Di Bernardo, *Un vescovo umanista alla corte pontificia: Giannantonio Campano (1429–1477)* (Rome, 1975); Frank-Rutger Hausmann, “Giovanni Antonio Campano,” in *DBI*, vol. XVII (1974), pp. 424–429; and Susanna de Beer, *The Poetics of Patronage: Poetry as Self-Advancement in Giannantonio Campano* (Turnhout, 2012).

⁸¹ There is a digression devoted specifically to the issue of prose rhythm in *DHD*, 156.7–158.4. As Ferraù notes (*ibid.*, p. 157, n. 63), knowledge of classical *numerus* had actually been available since Barzizza’s *De compositione* (1423) and is evinced in the works of Piccolomini and Bruni. Bruni even considers it an important component of preserving the tenor of the Greek original in Latin translations; see his *De interpretatione recta* in Bruni, *Opere letterarie*, pp. 150–192, specifically at 158, 162, 166, and 192, as well as in the general discussion on pp. 164–178. Nevertheless this knowledge was seldom put into practice before the 1490s, on which see John O. Ward, “Cicero and Quintilian,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. III, pp. 77–87. Prose rhythm is alluded to several times in the *Brutus*; see A.E. Douglas, “Introduction,” in Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Brutus*, ed. A.E. Douglas (Oxford, 1966), pp. ix–lxii, at xxx.

⁸² For the tireless commentator and lexicographer Perotti, archbishop of Siponto, who was best known for his *Cornucopiae* and for his feud with Calderini, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 159.6–10, and Jean-Louis Charlet, “Perotti (Niccolò),” in Nativel (ed.), *Centuriae Latinae*, pp. 601–605. For Calderini, who served as secretary to Cardinal Bessarion and specialized in commentaries on difficult texts, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 159.9–161.5 with related bibliography; see also Alessandro Perosa, “Calderini (Calderinus, Caldarinus, de Caldarinis), Domizio (Domitius, Domicius, Domicus),” in *DBI*, vol. XVI (1973), pp. 597–605; and Maurizio Campanelli, *Polemiche e filologia ai primordi della stampa: le Observationes di Domizio Calderini* (Rome, 2001).

the leading man (*princeps*) by the common consent of Italy.”⁸³ Platina, in addition to his “affable and perfectly urbane style,” was, “to the extent permitted by his age, the wisest of men.”⁸⁴

Further advances, albeit not perfection, were then to be achieved in Cortesi’s third period. The twenty-four humanists grouped together by Antonio into this “more recent generation”⁸⁵ were for the most part active in Rome and were affiliated specifically with Pomponio Leto’s circle, although humanists unaffiliated with Rome do also appear.⁸⁶ In comparison to the second period, the information on this generation is sparse and tends to be superficial. Nevertheless a focus on poetry and oratory emerges. Poetic distinction is said to have been earned by the *Pomponiani* Settimuleio Campano, Paolo Marsi, and Flavio Pantagato, as well as by Bonino Mombrizio, professor of Latin and Greek in Milan, and Cherubino Quarqualio, a friend of Ficino and secretary to cardinals Cosimo Orsini and Giovanni Conti.⁸⁷ Antonio reserves his highest praise, however, for the Hungarian student of Guarino, Janus Pannonius – “the one to overshadow all the rest in poetic glory” – although this praise is challenged by Alessandro, according to whom Janus had all the faults of the earlier poets and “did not even once suspect what in the world *varietas* was.”⁸⁸ In oratory, honorable

⁸³ For Gaza, an intimate of Bessarion renowned both for teaching Greek and for translating Greek scientific texts into Latin, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 160.15–162.1; quotations: “in eo primum cum summa philosophia summam eloquentiam coniunctam”; “Iure igitur totius Italiae consensu est princeps iudicatus.” See also Concetta Bianca, “Gaza, Teodoro,” in *DBI*, vol. LII (1999), pp. 737–746.

⁸⁴ For the papal librarian and biographer Platina (Bartolomeo Sacchi), see Cortesi, *DHD*, 166.1–167.10; quotations: “quantum illius aetatis iudicio patiebatur, non dubitarem eum unum inter multos sapientissimum appellare. Erat enim is cum sermone comis et perurbanus . . .” See also Mary Ella Milham’s “Introduction” to Platina, *On Right Pleasure and Good Health: A Critical Edition and Translation of De Honesta Voluptate et Valetudine*, ed. and tr. M.E. Milham (Tempe, 1998), pp. 1–45.

⁸⁵ See note 34 above.

⁸⁶ On the Roman connection of the majority of humanists in this generation, see Ferraù, “Introduzione,” pp. 38–39, and *passim* in the notes to each figure in Cortesi, *DHD*, pp. 168–185.

⁸⁷ For Settimuleio Campano (called il Campanino), who was arrested and tortured along with Platina in relation to the plot against Paul II, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 168.20–169.2 with related bibliography. For Paolo Marsi, a professor of rhetoric in Rome, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 176.3–11 and Paolo Pontari, “Marsi, Paolo,” in *DBI*, vol. LXX (2008), pp. 741–744. For Flavio Pantagato (Giovanni Battista Capranica), elected bishop of Fermo in 1478 and killed there in 1484 via defenestration for alleged philandering, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 176.12–177.9 and Massimo Miglio, “Capranica, Giovan Battista (Flavius Panthagatus),” in *DBI*, vol. XIX (1976), pp. 154–157. For Bonino Mombrizio, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 174.7–10 and Serena Spanò Martinelli, “Mombrizio (Montebretto), Bonino,” in *DBI*, vol. LXXV (2011), pp. 471–475. For Quarqualio, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 180.11–182.1 with related bibliography.

⁸⁸ Cortesi, *DHD*, 172.8–10: “nec ipse unquam suspicatus est quanam essent numerorum varietates.” For more on this exchange and its implications for Italian exceptionalism in humanism, see below, pp. 164–165. On Janus Pannonius, bishop of Pécs, a friend of and then conspirator against King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 171.14–20. See also Marianna D. Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius, Poet and Politician* (Zagreb, 1981); and Ian Thomson, *Humanist Pietas: The Panegyric of Janus Pannonius on Guarinus Veronensis* (Bloomington, Ind., 1998), pp. 1–65.

mention is given to Antonio Lolli and to Ludovico Carbone, the latter of whom pronounced the funeral oration for Guarino Veronese. Bernardo Giustinian's *Oratio apud Sixtum IV*, held in Rome on December 2, 1471, is described as "affluent and rich in its language."⁸⁹ Historiography, however, and another activity one might expect to find – philology – are barely mentioned.⁹⁰

At the end of the dialogue Antonio picks out four individuals from the whole history of humanism for special praise:

Leonardo Bruni, the prince of his age, will please us enough if we look to him for dignity of expression and *copia*. No less agreeable was Theodore Gaza's learned, pithy, and sweet style. As for Antonio Campano, what magnificence, what ornament did his style lack? And who showed more natural ability than Poggio in his ease in speaking, who so much native intelligence? It is amazing how much each one pleases in his own way.⁹¹

Notably, all of these humanists belong to the second period, whose weak division, which as we saw above started around mid-century, seems to be incorporated in the choice of two earlier humanists, Bruni and Poggio, and two later ones, Gaza and Campano. Poggio's especial importance likely comes as much from his ability in speaking as from another attribute: "He applied his whole soul to imitating Cicero, which he practiced every day."⁹²

Nevertheless, none of these humanists was simply good without reservation, for all, per the title of the dialogue, were merely *homines docti* (learned

⁸⁹ For the esteemed orator (but otherwise obscure) Antonio Lolli, who was a papal chaplain and apostolic secretary to Pius II and secretary to Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 180.11–182.2 with related bibliography; see also the final paragraph before the "Fonti e Bibl." section (p. 441, col. 1) of Marco Pellegrini, "Loli (Lolli), Gregorio (Goro)," in *DBI*, vol. LXV (2005), pp. 438–441. For Ludovico Carbone, a popular orator and a professor of rhetoric and *humanae litterae* in Ferrara, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 184.6–185.2 with related bibliography and Lao Paoletti, "Carbone, Ludovico," in *DBI*, vol. XIX (1976), pp. 699–703. For the Venetian statesman, orator, and historian Bernardo Giustinian, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 183.5–8; quotation: "affluenti et copioso." For the identification of this oration, which the text merely describes as "illa Romae habita" (183.8), see *ibid.*, p. 183, n. 94. Further on Giustinian, see Patricia H. Labalme, *Bernardo Giustiniani, a Venetian of the Quattrocento* (Rome, 1969) and King, *Venetian Humanism*, pp. 381–383.

⁹⁰ Flavio Pantagato is said to have written a *Life of Trajan* (Cortesi, *DHD*, 177.8–9; Ferrau [ibid., p. 177, n. 86] cannot confirm the existence of this work), and Lorenzo Bonincontri di San Miniato is said to have written a work of history "as well as he could" (183.9–184.1: "quoquo modo potuit"). Lorenzo's commentary on Manilius (184.1–5) is the only philological work explicitly mentioned in this generation.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 185.21–186.1: "Leonardus Arretinus, illius aetatis princeps, satis nos delectabit, si in eo amplitudinem et copiam requisiverimus; nec minus iucunditatis habet erudita illa Theodori Gazae et sententiosa et mollis oratio. Iam vero Antonio Campano quod lumen orationis, quae ornamenta desunt? Quid Poggi ingeniosa in dicendo facilitas, quis coeterorum praeclara ingenia? Mirum est quantum in suo quisque genere delectet."

⁹² *Ibid.*, 135.8–9: "tendebat toto animo et quotidiano quodam usu ad effingendum M. Tullium."

men), not, as Facio or Biondo would have said, *oratores* (orators). This is an important distinction for Cortesi, one which he signals near the beginning of the dialogue when his own character, Paolo, says, “let’s continue with the discussion we had started about learned men (*hominibus doctis*); I wouldn’t dare yet call them orators (*oratoribus*).”⁹³ As Giacomo Ferraù has explained, the point is to call attention to the distance separating the humanists from the objects of their imitation: the *oratores* of ancient Rome, the Latin stylists whose history Cicero had written in his *Brutus* (the work that provides Cortesi with his own literary model).⁹⁴ Admittedly, one *doctus homo* in the dialogue is called an *orator* – Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini – and thus Antonio’s description of him was translated above as “the only true humanist (*solum oratorem*) in this army of learned men (*ex hac acie doctorum*).”⁹⁵ Is this praise hyperbolic?⁹⁶ At any rate it is not extended to anyone else, not even the four greats exalted at the end of the dialogue. For all intents and purposes, the men of Cicero’s time were *oratores*, whereas the humanists were *homines docti* whose project was to become *oratores* through the revival of *studia doctrinae*, or *studia eloquentiae*. The path was long, and, as Cicero himself reminds us, “nihil est enim simul et inventum et perfectum” (*Brutus*, xviii.71).

Was the humanist project then ever completed? Did it ever produce true *oratores*? No unequivocal answer emerges from *De hominibus doctis*, but Cortesi implies that such has indeed happened in his own generation. One indication is given at the end of the dialogue. There Paolo and Alessandro beg Antonio to give his opinion about living humanists, which he politely but steadfastly refuses to do. While making excuses he notes that Paolo would take greater pleasure in “the praises of the living than of the dead,

⁹³ Ibid., 110.2–4: “Sed pergamus potius ad ea quae coepimus de hominibus doctis, oratoribus enim non ausim iam dicere.”

⁹⁴ Ferraù, “Introduzione,” p. 9, n. 10. At one point in the dialogue, the appellation *homines docti* is made equivalent to *diserti*, or “the well-spoken,” a term that indicates eloquence but on a level inferior to one who is truly *eloquens*. See Cortesi, *DHD*, 107.8–9: “Quaeritis igitur quanti et quales in disertorum numero habiti sint et qui mihi ad aliquam eloquentiae laudem maxime accessisse videantur.” See *Thesaurus linguae latinae*, fasc. V.1.2, *sub voce* “disertus,” IV (col. 1377). The phrase as used by Cortesi here is borrowed from Cicero’s *Brutus*, xxxv.135 (see Cortesi, *DHD*, p. 107, *apparatus fontium*), where it is applied to orators who flourished before Latin reached its maturity in the generation of Antonio and Crassus.

⁹⁵ See above, note 79.

⁹⁶ The possible insincerity of Antonio’s praise is suggested by the fact that Cortesi’s treatment of Piccolomini is modeled very closely on Cicero’s portrait of Marcus Porcius Cato in the *Brutus* (xv.61ff.) (see Ferraù, “Introduzione,” p. 12). As emerges in the *Brutus* (lxxxv.294), Cicero’s portrait of Cato is itself insincere. Cortesi’s treatment of Piccolomini might then be equally insincere, although such depends on the meanings Cortesi intended to attribute to his various intertextual borrowings and his assumptions about his readers’ ability to recognize the source.

since you perhaps think that the *studia eloquentiae* have been advanced by more illustrious writings *in our time*.”⁹⁷ Paolo does not respond, but Antonio’s assumption that his interlocutors esteem their contemporaries more highly than their predecessors is partly confirmed by Alessandro, who attributes Antonio’s reticence to a fear of “diminishing the glory of those you have mentioned through a comparison *to the living*.” He elaborates:

This is what I think about them in general: they devoted themselves wholeheartedly to every kind of learning, but they did not achieve the beauty and flower of Latin style, which you cannot deny has been more elegantly cultivated *by the men of our age* and increased with greater *artificium*.⁹⁸

Antonio concurs about the excellence of “our fellows,” saying that they “have recently discovered (*inventum*) or explained (*illustratum*) what was unknown for about a thousand years.”⁹⁹

Another indication that humanists of Cortesi’s time have become true *oratores* is provided by the way in which Antonio and the others judge their predecessors. By ascribing Bernardo Giustinian’s deficiencies in oratory, or Porcellio’s in poetry, or Valla’s in periodic syntax, or Poggio’s in general style to *their age’s* ignorance of *oratorium artificium*, the implication is that the current age, on the contrary, does possess knowledge of these rules; otherwise it could not judge them on such grounds.¹⁰⁰ This theoretical knowledge is what the forerunners of humanism completely lacked, and what teachers like Chrysoloras, George of Trebizond, and Pomponio Leto helped their students to recover by guiding them in the proper imitation of the best ancient sources. Cortesi’s schema suggests that if the history of humanism is equivalent to steady progress in reconstructing the *ars*

⁹⁷ Cortesi, *DHD*, 185.16–19: “Quanquam tu quidem, Paule, quod fortasse hac aetate illustrioribus litteris eloquentiae studia aucta putes, vivorum magis laudibus delecteris quam eorum qui vita excesserunt” (emphasis mine).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 186.4–9: “. . . ne forte minuere eorum, quos collegisti, gloriam videreris, si eos cum his qui vivunt conferres. Equidem de quibusdam sic existimo: ipsos multum in omni genere doctrinae esse versatos, sed nondum lumen et florem Latinae orationis attigisse, quam tu negare non poteris ab huius aetatis hominibus et exultam esse politius et maiori artificio amplificatam” (emphasis mine).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 186.16–19: “. . . in quo gloriari nobis liceat, id esse nuper ab ingeniis nostrorum hominum vel inventum vel illustratum quod mille iam prope annos ignoratum sit.”

¹⁰⁰ A parallel passage is the collective judgment on the style of Giovanni Aurispa, Pier Candido Decembrio, and Niccolò Sagundino (whom Cortesi here erroneously calls Niccolò Euboico: see *ibid.*, p. 125, n. 19): “their knowledge was rude and rustic, lacking the polish of more refined efforts. The more elegant method of writing had not yet been introduced” (124.5–125.3: “sed istorum omnium fuit disciplina horrida et agrestis, sine nitore elegantioris industriae: nondum erat politior haec scribendi ratio importata”). The implication, of course, is that it has now been introduced.

oratoria, then that history reaches its end, becomes *perfectum*, when a later generation of humanists (thinks that it) grasps that *ars* so well that it can judge its predecessors precisely on such grounds.¹⁰¹

Finally, the excellence of Cortesi's own generation is demonstrated by *De hominibus doctis* as a work of literature. At the most basic level it is intended as a stylistic *tour de force*, an illustration of the proper imitation of Cicero.¹⁰² This applies not only to general lexis and syntax but also to *numerus* or *cursus*, the prose rhythm that Campano had hit upon by lucky imitation but whose *artificium* he and the rest of his age supposedly lacked.¹⁰³ In the dedicatory letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, Cortesi boasts that his dialogue pleases both for its *copia* and for its *orationis cursus*, thereby declaring his recovery of this hitherto unassimilated aspect of Cicero's style.¹⁰⁴ And to the extent that Cortesi claims to have written down a dialogue that actually happened,¹⁰⁵ he implicitly praises the other two interlocutors as well for their Ciceronianism. Furthermore, *De hominibus doctis* is not only a stylistic imitation of Cicero's language but also a formal imitation of his *Brutus*, and the intertextual parallels between the two dialogues amount to the declaration of a manifesto. According to the *Brutus*, where Cicero traces the development of oratory in Greece and then in Rome, Latin historically reached its maturity in the generation of Antonius and Crassus and its ultimate perfection in his own time – perhaps in the likes of Hortensius, Marcellus, and Caesar but certainly in himself.¹⁰⁶ Likewise, Cortesi seems to identify a kind of maturity in the Latin of Piccolomini, Campano,

¹⁰¹ Only in the realm of historiography does doubt linger about the current generation's mastery of its precepts; in that connection Paolo says that "*we* lack these tools, and if *we* write anything worthy of praise at all in this genre it is only by accident or chance" (ibid., 137.11–13: "*nostros autem his instrumentis omnino carere atque eosdem in hoc praesertim scribendi genere nihil admodum laudis consequi posse, nisi quando temere aut casu*").

¹⁰² This is not to say that Cortesi's Latin is just like Cicero's; in reality it exhibits noteworthy lexical aberrations from the master (see Ferraù, "Nota al testo," p. 90). Yet strict lexical adherence to Cicero was not part of Cortesi's Ciceronianism, on which see above, note 23. As for the high degree of difficulty in properly imitating Cicero, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 135.9–136.2, which echoes a passage from his letter to Poliziano (*Ciceronian Controversies*, p. 10), and 172.13–15.

¹⁰³ Cf. Hermann Gmelin, *Das Prinzip der Imitatio in den romanischen Literaturen der Renaissance* (Erlangen, 1932), pp. 180–181.

¹⁰⁴ Cortesi, *DHD*, 104.1–3: "*tantum me illa vel copia vel illo orationis cursu delectavit ut decreverim eum ipsum sermonem mandare litteris.*"

¹⁰⁵ See ibid., 103.15–104.3.

¹⁰⁶ Cicero, *Brutus*, xxxvi.138, xliii.161. In the latter passage Cicero says, "I set this down precisely for this reason, that the time when Latin eloquence first came to maturity may be marked, and that it may be made clear that it now had been brought to all but the highest perfection. Henceforth no one could expect to add anything considerable to it unless he should come better equipped in philosophy, in law, in history" (tr. G.L. Hendrickson). Of course the one "better equipped" is Cicero himself, as the sequel ironically implies (162): "Shall we ever find such a one as you contemplate," said Brutus, "or is he indeed already here?" "I cannot say," I replied."

Gaza, and Platina, and, by parallelism with the *Brutus*, perfection in his own day – perhaps in figures like Leto and Pontano (who technically belong to an earlier generation but were still alive and active), and most likely in himself. By writing a dialogue that is a proper imitation of the *Brutus* in every respect (form, style, subject matter), Cortesi indicates that he is a true *orator* and the Cicero of his own age.

And indeed, this view seems to have found an echo in a fresco portraying rhetoric (1492–1494) in the Borgia apartments in the Vatican painted by Pinturicchio's workshop, a detail of which is reproduced on the cover of this book. In line with the larger cycle of the liberal arts of which it is a part, the personification of rhetoric ought to be flanked by its ancient Roman exemplar, Cicero; the image to the right of the seated figure, however, is a portrait of none other than Paolo Cortesi himself.¹⁰⁷ The student has taken the place of the master.

The humanist milieu

The striving for eloquence is clearly the *sine qua non* of Cortesi's humanism. Accordingly, although once referring to the humanists' endeavor as *studia humanitatis*, he more regularly calls it, as had Biondo Flavio, *studium* or *studia eloquentiae*, the "study" or "pursuit of eloquence."¹⁰⁸ But how exactly did humanists pursue eloquence? What activities did they engage in and what did they produce? In what context and under what circumstances did they operate? What was their position in society? Who were they? What

¹⁰⁷ Sabina Poeschel, "An Unknown Portrait of a Well-Known Humanist," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 43:1 (1990), pp. 146–154.

¹⁰⁸ *Studia humanitatis*: Cortesi, *DHD*, 167.14; *studium eloquentiae*: 117.6–7; *studia eloquentiae*: 111.13, 114.15, 185.17–18. Cortesi freely uses a variety of other terms that stand in an uncertain or undefined relationship to humanism, none of which however occurs with the frequency or consistency of *studia eloquentiae*. For example, educators like Chrysoloras and Guarino are said to provide instruction in the *maximae artes* (111.8), *bonae artes* (122.5, incorrectly numbered as 122.4), and *honestissimae artes* (122.15, incorrectly numbered as 122.14). These, especially *bonae artes*, are in all likelihood synonyms for *studia eloquentiae*. Elsewhere, however, there are vague references to other terms whose nature and content are unclear: *artes elegantes et ingenuae* (101.19, attributed to Lorenzo de' Medici); *ingenuae artes* (103.19, referring to Alessandro's education); *graviiores artes* (133.1, attributed to Ermolao Barbaro); *gravissimae disciplinae* (101.20–21, attributed to Lorenzo de' Medici, where it likely refers to politics); *disciplinae maximae* (136.11, which are said to be above the visual arts and music); *studia* and *studium doctrinae* (103.12, 134.8, 164.9 and *passim*, where it has a general sense of "learning" of subjects or skills as opposed to the natural ability or talent of *ingenium*; see also below, pp. 179–182). Only one individual's *artes* are specifically enumerated: in the dedicatory letter, Lorenzo de' Medici is attributed with eloquence but also with other *artes*, such as music, mathematics, and philosophy, that are not (the first two), or are not typically (the last), attributed to the humanists in the dialogue. However, the praise of Lorenzo is pure panegyric, not critique, and thus it cannot be collated directly with that of the humanists.

kind of lives did they live? How, in short, did Cortesi envision the humanist milieu?

On the level of ideals, the pursuit of eloquence is closely coupled with a passion for antiquity. But while the latter would appear to be a necessary trait of humanists, it is nevertheless not alone sufficient grounds to be included in their number. Such can be inferred from an important passage near the beginning of the dialogue. When challenged by Alessandro for not mentioning Dante and Petrarch, Antonio defends his choice to begin with Chrysoloras and thus to pass over Italians from the Trecento, saying:

I began with Chrysoloras . . . because eloquence generally seems to have risen in his time . . . I would not dare to deny that Dante and Petrarch burned with an overwhelming zeal for antiquity. But Dante is like an ancient painting: the colors are gone and only the outlines remain to give some kind of pleasure.¹⁰⁹

As for Petrarch, we saw above that “his style is not really Latin and is sometimes downright frightful.”¹¹⁰ Therefore, although he and Dante possessed the zeal for classical antiquity that was generally understood to be a trait of humanists, and on account of which some people (like Alessandro) might actually consider them such, in Cortesi’s eyes it could not make up for their utter lack of Latin eloquence. This is because – as is implied in the comparison of Dante to a faded painting – eloquence itself is considered the essence of antiquity. Love of antiquity that fails to grasp that essence ends up a somewhat pleasing but nonetheless hollow form.

In the pages of *De hominibus doctis*, passion for eloquence and antiquity manifests itself in certain activities, most commonly either teaching eloquence to others or, preferably, producing writings that embodied it. Perhaps overstating the case a bit, Cortesi claims in his dedicatory letter, “anything that is written down, of whatever kind, is in and of itself praiseworthy.”¹¹¹ On the other hand, those who leave no writings tend to forfeit their title as proper humanists. Accordingly, otherwise accomplished individuals who have written nothing are purposefully excluded from the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 113.8–17: “a Grisolora exordium coepi . . . quoniam illis temporibus erexisse se admodum eloquentia videri solet . . . Ego vero negare non ausim flagrantissimum in Dante et in Petrarcha studium fuisse priscarum rerum; sed in Dante tanquam in veteri pictura, detractis coloribus, nonnisi lineamenta delectant.”

¹¹⁰ See above, note 39.

¹¹¹ Cortesi, *DHD*, 104.8–9: “quicquid litteris mandatur, quaecumque sit, per se laudabile est.”

dialogue,¹¹² and Paolo even digresses at one point to wage a polemic against those who criticize the works of others while producing none of their own:

Those who try to appear wise but write nothing upset me very much, unless they really are wise or contribute to educating the young. This hateful and useless brand of people harms the living and posterity alike, tearing the works of others to pieces but daring to write nothing themselves. They claim to be motivated by modesty and an awareness of their own limitations, but all they do is hinder the studies of more gifted men.¹¹³

Antonio agrees: “such people are rightly left out of our account, since they did nothing while living to be included.”¹¹⁴ Whether or not Cortesi has specific individuals in mind here is unclear. One such person does, however, mysteriously appear in the dialogue: Niccolò Niccoli, Manetti’s paragon of virtue who in reality was infamous for perfectly corresponding to Paolo’s description. Fittingly, he is mentioned as having “achieved high fame” not for contributing to eloquence but “in cultivating friendships with the greatest humanists.”¹¹⁵ Considering his notoriety for losing the friendship of the great humanists, one must question the sincerity of this passage. Is this indirect criticism, veiled in order not to estrange the dedicatee, Lorenzo de’ Medici, whose grandfather Cosimo was counted among Niccoli’s closest friends? Be that as it may, Niccoli is the only individual treated in the dialogue who was neither a writer nor a teacher.

Of writings, Cortesi has the highest respect for historiography, which he calls “the single greatest rhetorical genre” and elsewhere “a great genre and the most difficult of all.”¹¹⁶ In prose, oratory seems to follow history in

¹¹² See *ibid.*, 168.2–7: “I do not doubt that many accomplished men have been passed over, but this is their own fault for having left no writings. For we said in the beginning that our discussion would include those who we know were praised by our forefathers or who submitted writings to the judgment of critics” (“Nec enim ego dubito multos praeteritos fuisse ex veteribus eruditos homines, sed hoc accidit culpa eorum qui nihil scriptum reliquerunt. Diximus autem nos a principio eos in hunc sermonem relatores, quos aut a maioribus laudatos accepimus aut quorum scripta in existimantium arbitrio versentur”).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 168.8–14: “Nam isti, qui nihil scribendo volunt videri sapere (nisi alioqui doctissimi sint aut erudiant iuventutem) nullo modo mihi placent. Odiosum sane genus hominum et inutile videtur, non solum vivis, sed etiam posteris nocere, cum aliena lacerant, ipsi nihil audeant scribere atque id se facere modestia et conscientia ingenii commotos dicant, ingeniosiorum quidem hominum studia retardant.” This digression is a creative adaptation of Cicero, *Brutus*, xxiv.91–92.

¹¹⁴ Cortesi, *DHD*, 168.17–18: “Merito isti nullo loco sunt numerandi, qui nihil in vita effecerunt ut numerarentur.”

¹¹⁵ For Niccoli, see *ibid.*, 123.17–124.2: “Hisdem temporibus fuit Nicolaus Nocolus, qui magnam gloriam adeptus est in colendis amicitiiis doctissimorum hominum.” See Chapter 2 above, pp. 129–130, on Niccoli’s reputation as an overly harsh critic.

¹¹⁶ See Cortesi, *DHD*, 121.5: “cum historia sit rerum omnium difficillima”; 136.4–6: “est magnum munus historia et, ut paulo ante dixi, omnium rerum difficillimum.” Once again, this is a creative

importance. Textual scholarship is mentioned almost as an afterthought.¹¹⁷ It is translation, though, that seems to occupy the lowest rung – a notable change of fortune from its high estimation in the works of Facio and Biondo. Antonio sneers that humanists through mid-century “preferred to produce translations,” and that “there seemed to be as great a desire to write something as there was a paucity of original compositions.” He attributes this predilection to a lack of ability:

as if at the dawn of literature, they did not trust themselves and, like toddlers, could not move to and fro unless in a carriage or with a guide to follow. And so, *since translation was easier*, providing all these aids to learning seemed to them a good way to be highly esteemed by posterity.¹¹⁸

As for the relationship between prose and poetry, Cortesi does not appear to conceive of a hierarchy. But he does demand specialization in one or the other, thus being the only one of our authors to prescribe, rather than simply describe, a division in humanism between poets and prose writers. Antonio reasons:

We are not made by nature to be able to excel at several things at the same time. Therefore we should let nature be our guide and follow only where she herself leads or takes us. That way we could reach perfection in one genre rather than stretching ourselves across the study of multiple different arts.¹¹⁹

Accordingly, two humanists – Martino Filetico, a student of Guarino and himself a teacher, and the otherwise obscure Daniel Francinus – are said to have failed to develop a decent style on account of wanting to excel

adaptation of Cicero, *De oratore*, 2, 15, 62: “Videtisne quantum munus sit oratoris historia? Haud scio an flumine orationis et varietate maximum.” See note 48 above. For a discussion of Cortesi’s intention in adapting the quotation as he does, see Baker, “Launching the *ars historica*.”

¹¹⁷ Philology is mentioned in relation to only three humanists: Domizio Calderini (Cortesi, *DHD*, 159.9–161.5), Giovanni Andrea Bussi (154.11–155.1), and Lorenzo Bonincontri di S. Miniato (184.4–5), of whom de’ Bussi is criticized for lacking the proper *ratio* and relying too much on conjecture. Antonio could very well be referring to philology when he describes the achievement of living humanists thus: “our fellows have recently discovered (*inventum*) or explained (*illustratum*) what was unknown for about a thousand years” (see above, note 99).

¹¹⁸ Cortesi, *DHD*, 146.2–10: “Atque ego in ipsis et in aliis quos enumeravimus intelligo homines libentius ad interpretum munera esse conversos: sed nos tamen colligimus omnes, ut appareat quam multi scribendi cupiditate flagrant, quam pauci aliquid ex suo protulerint . . . Quia velut tum nascentibus litteris sibi ipsi diffiderant et erant tanquam anniculi infantes qui nonnisi in curriculo aut praecunte duce inambulant. Itaque, cum esset facilius illud vertendi munus, bene de posteris suis mereri videbantur si tam multa adiumenta ingeniis suppeditarent” (emphasis mine).

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 179.2–180.3: “Neque enim ita facti a natura sumus ut possimus pluribus simul rebus excellere: itaque in hoc arbitror sequendam esse naturam ducem atque eo tantummodo eundum quo ab ipsa trahimur et ducimur, ut simus potius simplici in genere perfecti quam nos totos variarum multiplicumque artium studiis applicemus.”

in both poetry and prose.¹²⁰ The rule was not ironclad though: humanists like Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini and Antonio Campano distinguished themselves in both genres.¹²¹

All of this literary production was of course in Latin. As we saw above, Antonio recognizes the high quality of the vernacular works of Dante and Petrarch but laments that these writers could not channel their extraordinary *ingenia* into Latin composition. No other vernacular efforts are mentioned in the dialogue, which suggests that for Cortesi, as for all our other authors except Manetti, humanism had nothing to do with the *volgar lingua*.

The relationship of Cortesi's humanism to the vernacular is, however, a bit ambiguous and requires clarification. Cortesi is known to have composed verse in the vernacular, and a contemporary account of his academy portrays him expounding on *decorum* in Dante's and Petrarch's vernacular poetry.¹²² What is more, Ciceronians in general were not averse to the vernacular (e.g., Pietro Bembo), and as John Monfasani has pointed out:

Ciceronianism had consequences for how one viewed the vernacular, but, contrary to common belief, in the case of many Ciceronians it meant embracing the vernacular as the ordinary language of discourse and also as a literary language.¹²³

Such might have been the case for the mature Cortesi, who in his *De cardinalatu* would classify the various vernaculars, defend Tuscan as the best, and explain how its speech can be properly ornamented.¹²⁴ But if Cortesi did ultimately embrace the vernacular as a literary language, he

¹²⁰ See *ibid.*, 178.7–179.2; applied to both is the description: “when working at one he studied the other too little and excelled in neither” (178.10–12: “cum in altero laboraret, in altero parum studii poneret, in neutro excelebat”). On Filetico, see, in addition to the bibliography in *ibid.*, p. 178, n. 88, Concetta Bianca, “Filetico (Filettico), Martino,” in *DBI*, vol. XLVII (1997), pp. 636–640. For Francinus, see Cortesi, *DHD*, p. 179, n. 89.

¹²¹ For Piccolomini, see *ibid.*, 153.5–154.8; for Campano, 155.11–159.5, whose epigrams are specifically mentioned (159.3).

¹²² See D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, p. 106, and McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation*, p. 221. In “Humanism in Rome,” p. 280, D'Amico explains the Roman humanists' “cultivation of Petrarchan verse” as “a form becoming to court life.”

¹²³ Monfasani, “The Ciceronian Controversy,” p. 398. As Monfasani notes, Bembo was only one of many Ciceronians to champion the vernacular and even to prefer it for everyday use. Indeed, the vernacular's value for quotidian concerns had been defended continuously since Dante, who considered it the natural language of discourse as opposed to Latin, an artificial literary language. Dante's position, in various forms, had adherents among Quattrocento humanists, most notably Leonardo Bruni. See Mazzocco, *Linguistic Theories in Dante and the Humanists*.

¹²⁴ See the chapter *De sermone* in Book Two, reproduced in full in Carlo Dionisotti, *Gli umanisti e il volgare fra Quattro e Cinquecento*, ed. Vincenzo Fera (Milan, 2003), pp. 56–65. See also Dionisotti's comments on Cortesi's stance towards the vernacular, pp. 65–69.

nevertheless does not seem to have accepted it as a language of learned discourse in the period when he wrote *De hominibus doctis*.¹²⁵ For he presents his dialogue, which is aimed precisely at showcasing his own literary talent, as the written form of an actual, informal but highly learned conversation in perfect Ciceronian Latin. Furthermore, as we have seen, he characterizes the age of Dante and Petrarch as a time when “eloquence had utterly lost its voice.”¹²⁶ And in his description of Dante, he directly attributes the poet’s “unintelligibility” in certain matters to the vernacular’s inability to express complex ideas.¹²⁷ For the Cortesi of *De hominibus doctis*, there is no doubt that humanism’s central goal of reviving eloquence was a strictly Latin affair.

In addition to Latin, Greek features prominently in Cortesi’s humanists. Special emphasis is placed on this accomplishment for figures in the first half of the fifteenth century, who, as Antonio says, devoted so much effort to translation from Greek into Latin. As time passes, however, Greek is mentioned less and less often, and the impression is that it is not essential to a humanist profile.¹²⁸ The reason for this is likely that, as knowledge of the *oratorium artificium* increased and humanists, to continue Cortesi’s own metaphor, grew up linguistically, Greek was no longer seen as an essential guide to proper composition and eloquence in Latin. This is not to say that knowledge of Greek decreased or became less widespread – the opposite is in fact the case¹²⁹ – but only that its importance for humanism waned in Cortesi’s eyes as it lost its initial usefulness for Latin. On the other hand, Cicero claimed that knowledge of Greek was always necessary for good Latin, and so perhaps Cortesi’s characters take knowledge of Greek for granted as their review reaches their own time. It is also possible, however – indeed probable – that the scant attention paid to Greek is in part a reflection of Cortesi’s own apparent ignorance of the language as well as of the priorities of Pomponio Leto’s Academy, where the knowledge of Greek was less prized than elsewhere.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation*, p. 221, dates Cortesi’s interest in the vernacular to a period posterior to *DHD*.

¹²⁶ See above, note 37. ¹²⁷ See below, pp. 180–181.

¹²⁸ Not counting Byzantine émigrés: in Cortesi’s first period (Dante to Salutati), no humanist is said to know Greek; in the second period (Bruni to Platina), there are eight, all of whom flourished before mid-century; in the third period (Settimuleio Campano to Ludovico Carbone), three. Significantly, Biondo Flavio is said to have written history “without knowledge of Greek” (Cortesi, *DHD*, 148.4–5: “Flavius enim Blondus sine Graecis litteris prosequutus est historiam diligenter . . .”).

¹²⁹ Hankins, “Lo studio del greco.”

¹³⁰ Cortesi’s command of Greek is uncertain. On the subordinate status of Greek in late fifteenth-century Rome, see D’Amico, “Humanism in Rome,” pp. 279–280. Regarding Leto’s teaching, note the lack of any significant Greek element in the activity traced by Accame Lanzillotta, *Pomponio*

If Cortesi portrays humanists as primarily occupied with Latin eloquence, he does not bind this pursuit to any disciplinary categories. He never considers excluding anyone from the ranks of humanism, as Facio did with Alberti, simply for having additional interests or even a career in a traditional university field like law or philosophy. Antonio Beccadelli's expertise in law is mentioned without further comment, and Francesco Accolti d'Arezzo is praised as "the one great humanist who was a truly great jurisconsult," as well as for his vast learning "in all the arts and disciplines."¹³¹ This is a surprising change, as not even the ecumenical Manetti allowed such a combination. Even more unexpected is the special relationship philosophy has to humanism in *De hominibus doctis*. On the one hand, several humanists, especially the Byzantine émigrés, are said to have studied it. At times Cortesi appears to have moral philosophy in mind, as when he says that Piccolomini's philosophical studies were reflected in the *sententiae* of his orations,¹³² or when he attributes Theodore Gaza's virtue to his pursuit of "the study of philosophy with his way of life, not with mere words."¹³³ Yet Gaza was an Aristotelian. And although the description of Gaza might seem to imply a typical humanist criticism of scholastic philosophy, Cortesi partially connects the humanist recovery of eloquence to Aristotelian rhetoric.¹³⁴ As seen above, George of Trebizond's study of the Peripatetics made him one of the great teachers of *oratorium artificium*.¹³⁵ Furthermore, John Argyropoulos was "just about a perfect Peripatetic and quite an agreeable writer," and "his student Donato Acciaiuoli was rather

Leto, pp. 85–189; Accame Lanzillotta, "L'insegnamento di Pomponio Leto nello *Studium Urbis*," in Lidia Capo and Maria Rosa Di Simone (eds.), *Storia della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia de "La Sapienza"* (Rome, 2000), pp. 71–91; and Maurizio Campanelli and Maria Agata Pincelli, "La lettura dei classici nello *Studium Urbis* tra Umanesimo e Rinascimento," in *ibid.*, pp. 93–195, at 168–174. See also D'Amico's description of the interests of Leto's Academy in *Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 91–92 and 97–102.

¹³¹ For Beccadelli, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 145.2; for Accolti, 182.5–183.3: "fuit unus doctissimorum hominum iurisconsultissimus. Nihil est enim litteris mandatum, nihil in artibus disciplinisque omnibus traditum quod ab hoc homine non sit aut cognitum aut investigatum." For Accolti, see the anonymous entry "Accolti, Francesco (detto Francesco Aretino o, per antonomasia, l'Aretino)," in *DBI*, vol. I (1960), pp. 104–105.

¹³² See Cortesi, *DHD*, 153.17–154.1. Piccolomini is not known to have studied philosophy. We have very little information about his education, though, beyond that he studied law under Mariano Sozzini in Siena.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 161.6–12; quotation at 8–10: "nec erat in eorum numero qui, usurpatione disciplinae, verbis magis quam vita philosophiae studia persequuntur."

¹³⁴ In addition to the textual passages cited here, Cortesi might also have found value in Aristotle's discussion of prose rhythm and periodic structure, two aspects of *elocutio* dear to Cortesi, in chapters 8 and 9 respectively of Book III of the *Rhetoric*.

¹³⁵ See above, note 62.

well spoken.”¹³⁶ Ultimately, however, Cortesi cites relatively few examples of cohabitation between humanism and traditional university disciplines (as the praise of Accolti also implies). Nor does he ever extend this cohabitation to medicine or theology,¹³⁷ which he simply omits. Nevertheless, the reason that such pursuits are generally ignored would appear to be not that they are illicit but rather that they were comparatively less common or less suitable areas for distinction in Latin eloquence. Unlike Facio, Cortesi does not feel obliged to distance humanism from the university, perhaps because the two had become well enough integrated in his time.¹³⁸

Humanism’s integrity does need defending, however, when it comes to national boundaries. Antonio’s review contains only one northern humanist – Janus Pannonius, or Jan the Hungarian – whose treatment shows that humanism was, or ought to be, in Cortesi’s mind an essentially Italian enterprise. First, Antonio proffers a bit of backhanded praise for Janus’ poetry: “It was truly amazing that this foreigner (*externus*), this *barbarus*, whose people are usually less receptive to the Muses, achieved the highest admiration and fame for his talent.”¹³⁹ Alessandro then immediately objects:

Why are you extolling this foreigner (*externum*) so highly, as if he really did win more of every kind of praise than the Italians (*nostros*) and even scared them away from writing? If you’re being ironic, then you do well to encourage the *barbari* by praising Janus; but if you’re serious, be careful that you don’t bite off more than you can chew. If you praise him as intelligent

¹³⁶ Cortesi, *DHD*, 164.1–6: “Joannes Argiropolus Bisantius, prope perfectus peripateticus et sane tolerabilis scriptor . . . Huius auditor fuit Donatus Acciaiolus, homo non indisertus.” For Argyropoulos, professor at the Florentine Studio and teacher of Lorenzo de’ Medici, Landino, and Poliziano, see N.G. Wilson, *From Byzantium to Italy: Greek Studies in the Italian Renaissance* (London, 1992), pp. 86–90; and Emilio Bigi, “Argiropulo, Giovanni,” in *DBI*, vol. IV (1962), pp. 129–131. For Acciaiuoli, translator of Aristotle and of Leonardo Bruni (into Italian), see Garin, *Medioevo e rinascimento*, pp. 199–267.

¹³⁷ Although many of Cortesi’s humanists are ecclesiastics. We should also remember that one of Cortesi’s major works was his *Liber sententiarum*, a standard work of theology in Ciceronian language.

¹³⁸ It was precisely in the period between Facio’s and Cortesi’s writings – the second half of the fifteenth century – that humanism began to flourish in universities, whereas in the first quarter of the century humanists had avoided universities, and in the second they only began to stake their claim there; see Paul F. Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore, 2002), pp. 205–222; and for a more recent consideration with a different focus, David Lines, “Humanism and the Italian Universities,” in Celenza and Gouwens (eds.), *Humanism and Creativity*, pp. 327–346. Consider also that Cortesi’s teacher, Pomponio Leto, taught at Rome’s university, the Sapienza, and that his friend Poliziano taught at the Florentine Studio.

¹³⁹ Cortesi, *DHD*, 171.17–20: “Illud certe mirabile in hoc homine fuit, quod externus, quod barbarus (quae gens durior ad Musas videri solet) ad summam admirationem et ingenii famam pervenerit.”

and highly learned, then I wholeheartedly agree. So praise him this way now, and don't try to deprive our people (*nostris*) of their glory.¹⁴⁰

Here we have a case of Italian exceptionalism: humanism is Italian, and only Italians can be the best humanists and achieve the highest praise. Foreigners (*externi*) might participate in humanism, but as barbarians (*barbari*) they are not particularly suited to it – even if they, like Janus, had studied with Guarino. This haughtiness towards the *barbari* and their supposedly natural inability with the Latin language would endure throughout the sixteenth century and was sometimes even acknowledged by the “barbarians” themselves.¹⁴¹ Still, Alessandro seems also to belie his pride by a kind of jealousy and perhaps even uncertainty over the undisputed mastery of Italians within humanism; for if their status were secure, there would be no reason to defend it so vehemently. Be that as it may, Alessandro's tirade is the dialogue's only indication, admittedly oblique, that humanism was in the process of breaking free of Italy's borders and developing independently across the Alps.¹⁴²

What of the Byzantines, who appear in good number and who receive almost unconditional praise?¹⁴³ As non-Italians they should logically be *externi*, foreigners, but they are never labeled that way, nor is there ever any indication that they might be *barbari*. On the contrary, they seem to be welcomed into the group of *nostris*. As we shall see below in greater detail, Cortesi recognizes a cultural kinship between Italian humanists and the Greek diplomats and refugees who, starting with Chrysoloras, were some of their most important teachers. As carriers of the tradition supposedly

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 172.1–7: “Quid tu tantum externum effers, quasi vero iste, non modo nostros omni genere laudum superarit, sed etiam a scribendo deteruerit? Si iocaris, belle mihi videris eum laudando suffragari barbaris; sin asseveras, cave ne plus quaestionis suscipias quam possis sustinere. Eum laudas si ut ingeniosum ac plane doctum, prorsus assentior: modo ita laudes, ne gloriam nostris praereptam velis.”

¹⁴¹ See Kristian Jensen, “The Humanist Reform of Latin and Latin Teaching,” in Kraye (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 63–81, at 65–66. Cf. also Caspar Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 142–152.

¹⁴² On the diffusion of humanism from Italy to the rest of Europe, see Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (eds.), *The Renaissance in National Context* (Cambridge, 1992); Rabil (ed.), *Renaissance Humanism*, vol. II; Johannes Helmrath, “Diffusion des Humanismus: zur Einführung” in Helmrath, Muhlack, and Walther (eds.), *Diffusion des Humanismus*, pp. 9–29; and Paul Oskar Kristeller, “The European Diffusion of Italian Humanism,” in Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, vol. II, pp. 147–165, with related bibliography on p. 147.

¹⁴³ The *dotti bizantini* who appear in *DHD* are: Manuel Chrysoloras (111.8–113.12), Nicolò Sagundino (124.4–125.3, treated erroneously as two different people: Nicolò Euboico and Nicolò Sagundino), George of Trebizond (139.17–23), Theodore Gaza (160.15–162.7), Cardinal Bessarion (162.9–163.10), and John Argyropoulos (164.1–5). Only Sagundino is moderately criticized.

lost to Italy in the fifth century and being revived there in the fifteenth, there is no question of the Byzantines' place in humanism.

In addition to his outspoken hierarchy between *nostri* and *externi barbari*, Cortesi establishes a gradation within Italy as well, silently aggrandizing Rome and marginalizing Florence. As the dialogue progresses, what began as a pan-Italian vision (in the generations of Bruni and Valla) slowly narrows to focus almost exclusively on the Eternal City. By the 1460s the great humanists (with the exception of Pontano) are increasingly associated with Rome (Campano, Perotti, Calderini, Gaza, Bessarion, Platina), although many can still be claimed by Florence (Benedetto Accolti, Argyropoulos, Acciaiuoli, Matteo Palmieri).¹⁴⁴ In the third period, as noted above, the focus is almost exclusively on Rome, and not one Florentine is named. The competition between these two loci of humanism is as palpable as it is unspoken. That Cortesi has not forgotten the intimates of his dedicatee – men like Ficino, Landino, Pico, Poliziano, and Bartolomeo della Fonte – but is purposefully neglecting them emerges from an oblique reference to Poliziano, who is called “our friend” and whose critique of Ciceronians (“apes of Cicero”) is taken up and applied to those who imitate Cicero without the proper *ars*.¹⁴⁵ It is tempting to attribute the oblivion of Florence to Antonio's refusal to talk about contemporaries, but Giacomo Ferraù has demonstrated that Cortesi's procedure amounts to a *damnatio memoriae* of sorts.¹⁴⁶ For four contemporaries are indeed mentioned – Giorgio Merula, Pomponio Leto, Ermolao Barbaro, and Giovanni Pontano – three of whom act as foils for Florentine humanism: Merula had a heated polemic with Poliziano;¹⁴⁷ Barbaro defended rhetoric against Pico;¹⁴⁸ and, as we have seen, the praise of Pontano's poetic *ars* must be

¹⁴⁴ For the Romans, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 155.10–163.10, 166.1–167.10, to whose number Piccolomini might be added (153.5–154.8); for the Florentines, 164.1–165.4 and 135.1–3 for Accolti, whom Cortesi seems to see as actually belonging to the earlier generation of Florentines like Palla Strozzi and Poggio (134.7–135.4: “Tum etiam ex eo genere numerabatur Pallas Stroza . . . Nec longo intervallo aberat Benedictus Arretinus . . . Nam illis temporibus in Poggio Florentino”).

¹⁴⁵ This is said specifically in relation to Andrea Contrario, a Venetian active mostly in Rome. See *ibid.*, 172.13–15: “But he strayed far from the best kind of imitation and, as our friend shrewdly says, acted not like a student but an ape” (“Sed aliquanto tamen abest ab optimo genere imitandi et, ut scite amicus noster ait, non ille quidem ut alumnus, sed ut simia effingit”). Ferraù, “Il problema,” p. 157, denies that Poliziano is the friend cited.

¹⁴⁶ See Ferraù, “Introduzione,” pp. 53–54. See also Paolo Viti, “La Valdelsa e l'Umanesimo: i Cortesi,” in Gian Carlo Garfagnini (ed.), *Callimaco Esperiente poeta e politico del '400* (Florence, 1987), pp. 247–299, at 293–299.

¹⁴⁷ On the philological and personal rivalry between Merula and Poliziano, see Roberto Ricciardi, *La polemica fra Angelo Poliziano e Giorgio Merula: ricerche e documenti* (Alessandria, 2010).

¹⁴⁸ On this debate, see Ermolao Barbaro and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Filosofia o eloquenza?*, ed. Francesco Bausi (Naples, 1998).

understood in part as a silent rebuke to the divine frenzy of Ficino and Landino. Leto's presence, on the other hand, combined with that of an overwhelming number of his students in the third period, serves to portray him as the true inheritor of humanism, thus making his student Cortesi the following generation's heir apparent. Other strands of humanism, such as Ficino's poetics or Poliziano's eclecticism, are not presented as viable alternatives but rather as ignored as deviant.

The marginalization of Florence which we see here, as well as in Cortesi's quick dispatching of the Three Crowns and even of Salutati, the revered Florentine chancellor renowned especially for the power of his rhetoric, makes little sense in a work dedicated to Lorenzo the Magnificent.¹⁴⁹ Yet it is undeniable, and it is a needfully sobering reminder that the modern understanding of humanism has been unduly dominated by developments in Florence. One thinks of the enormous influence of Hans Baron's "civic humanism" thesis, based entirely on events and writings dealing with Florence at the turn of the fifteenth century. More important, because implicitly claiming a universal scope, is Eugenio Garin's *L'umanesimo italiano* – another work of inestimable impact on scholarship – in which the discussion of Quattrocento humanism revolves almost entirely around Florence. Subsequently, no other homes of humanism have received the same magnitude of microstudies of individual figures or intellectual circles. Not even the papal curia, despite its warm, unflagging hospitality to humanism from the very beginning of the fifteenth century, occupies as much space on university bookshelves or digital databases.¹⁵⁰ The upshot, or "revenge," as Randolph Starn has written, "of Florentine exceptionalism is to make whatever lies beyond Florence look unexceptional, ordinary, and routine."¹⁵¹ And to those used to hearing about the Platonism of Ficino and Landino, the poetics of divine frenzy, the philological breakthroughs

¹⁴⁹ On the reputation of Salutati's rhetoric, see Ronald G. Witt, *Hercules at the Crossroads: The Life, Works, and Thought of Coluccio Salutati* (Durham, NC, 1983), esp. pp. 111–177. On p. 159 Witt reports the famous *detto* attributed to Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan, viz. that "a letter of Salutati was worth a thousand horses."

¹⁵⁰ On the relationship between the papal curia and humanism, see James Hankins, "The Popes and Humanism," in *Humanism and Platonism*, vol. I, pp. 469–494, esp. 470–477; and Hankins, "Roma caput mundi: Humanism in High Renaissance Rome," in *Humanism and Platonism*, vol. I, pp. 495–507. The main studies on humanism in Rome are D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*; John W. O'Malley, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome: Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in the Sacred Orators of the Papal Court, c. 1450–1521* (Durham, NC, 1993); and now Elizabeth McCahill, *Reviving the Eternal City: Rome and the Papal Court, 1420–1447* (Cambridge, Mass., 2013).

¹⁵¹ Randolph Starn, "Afterword: Where is Beyond Florence?," in Paula Findlen, Michelle M. Fontaine, and Duane J. Osheim (eds.), *Beyond Florence: The Contours of Medieval and Early Modern Italy* (Stanford, 2003), pp. 233–239, at 234.

of Poliziano, or about Pico's attempts at religious, intellectual, and cultural syncretism, the imitative nature of Roman Ciceronianism must at first glance seem unexceptional, ordinary, if not downright boring.¹⁵² Similarly, Charles Stinger felt it necessary to explain the seemingly strange absence of advanced Greek studies in Roman humanism, to account for why

no specific intellectual program or cultural ideology evolved from Greek wisdom, as happened in Florence with the civic humanists' rediscovery of the political and moral values of the Periclean *polis* and with the Platonic Academy's dedication to Neo-Platonic metaphysics and aesthetics.

Despite recognizing that "Latin classicism in Renaissance Rome . . . meant more than a merely literary revival," he nevertheless offered a purely reductive explanation:

Humanism in Rome was in large part a courtier culture, finding its expression in oratory, in poetry, and in elegant and witty conversation within the setting of the *orti litterari*. This placed a premium on refinement of style.¹⁵³

Regardless of the factual accuracy of this statement, its reasoning neglects the enormously significant fact that the pursuit of Latin eloquence had been a – and as the texts of Piccolomini, Biondo, and Facio suggest, *the* – driving force of humanism throughout the fifteenth century. Thus Rome did not represent an aberration from Florence but rather the continuation of a mainstream tradition. What our sources indicate is that it was the ideal of Latin eloquence that nourished the souls of humanists all over Italy and that characterized their efforts outside of Florence (and in it as well, we must remember) throughout the entire Quattrocento, whereas the peculiar accomplishments of Laurentian Florence were just that – peculiar to Laurentian Florence, but not representative of broader trends in Italian humanism. This is one of the most important messages *De hominibus doctis* holds for us.

If Cortesi differentiates humanists according to civic affiliation and intellectual persuasion, he links them in their common reliance on patronage and in their association with princes.¹⁵⁴ In a short digression prompted by the mention of Cosimo de' Medici, Alessandro interjects, "I think the

¹⁵² For an example of the underestimation of Roman Ciceronianism, see D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 115–143; see also Kenneth Gouwens, "Perceiving the Past: Renaissance Humanism after the 'Cognitive Turn,'" *The American Historical Review*, 103 (1998), pp. 55–82, at 63–64, who criticizes this view.

¹⁵³ Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, pp. 287–288. ¹⁵⁴ Cf. Ferraù, "Introduzione," pp. 25–26.

princes of that age greatly aided the best minds.” And Paolo concurs: “You’re right. Their studies were nourished with rewards and came of age, as it were, in the bosom of princes.”¹⁵⁵ Patronage is also emphasized in the dedicatory letter, where it is the first theme sounded after humanism itself. *Principes* like Cosimo and Piero de’ Medici are praised for having “given such great aid to the humanists’ search for learning that they seemed themselves to have taken up the protection (*patrocinium*) of the neglected disciplines.” As for Lorenzo, “you have increased their glory not only by supporting the studies of gifted men, but also by spending all of your free time from affairs of state on the elegant and noble arts.”¹⁵⁶ Several more princes are said in the body of the dialogue to participate directly in humanism. Three are even portrayed as humanists in their own right. Two of them, Nicholas V and Pius II, distinguished themselves as such long before achieving temporal, and in their case spiritual, power, while the third, Sigismondo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini, was first and foremost a *condottiere*.¹⁵⁷ Nicholas is also praised for having “supported humanists with money and honors.”¹⁵⁸ Other rulers are lauded just for associating with great humanists. Thus Cosimo de’ Medici crops up in the section on Ambrogio Traversari, where their friendship is explained by the fact that “this great man always had humanists around him, whose company and conversation helped him, as it were, pleasantly to relax his mind when he was free from official duties.”¹⁵⁹ Similarly, the description of Lorenzo Valla occasions a cameo of his patron Alfonso of Aragon: “Alfonso enriched his great and unbelievable virtues with this additional praise, that he was not only on very close terms with humanists, but that he even ate together with them.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Cortesi, *DHD*, 128.10–14: “Mea quidem sententia est principes illius aetatis multum summis ingeniis profuisse. / [Paul.] Est ut dicis: aluntur profecto praemiis haec studia et quasi in principum sinu pubescunt.”

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.11–20: “Quorum studiis principes illius aetatis tantum ad facultatem perquirendae doctrinae profuerunt, ut pariter desertarum disciplinarum patrocinium suscepisse viderentur; quo in genere avus et pater tuus, sapientissimi homines, extiterunt qui, cum florerent omnibus virtutibus, hac tamen laude ingeniorum excitandorum longe coeteris praestiterunt. Tu vero, huius gloriae praeclarus amplificator, non modo extollis ingeniosorum hominum studia, sed etiam in maximis occupationibus omne domesticum tempus ad artes elegantes atque ingenuas confers.”

¹⁵⁷ For Nicholas V, see *ibid.*, 130.2–131.2; for Pius II (Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini), 153.5–154.9; for Malatesta, 152.20–153.4.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.1–2: “ab eo sunt docti homines et opibus aucti et honoribus.”

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.6–9: “Carus is fuit Cosmo Medici, nam semper magnus ille vir secum habuit palam doctos homines quorum in congressu et sermone, cum esset publicis muneribus vacuus, tanquam in iucundo quodam animi laxamento requiescebat.”

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.2–5: “Nam Alphonsus ipse ad summas incredibilesque eius virtutes adiecerat etiam hanc laudem, ut, non solum hominibus doctis familiarissime uteretur, sed etiam haberet in convictu.”

Princely patronage was necessary, in Cortesi's mind, if humanists were to pursue the proper kind of life for their studies: a contemplative one.¹⁶¹ The better humanists towards the end of the second period, like Campano, Gaza, and Platina, tend to be professional literary men who relied on the favor of popes and cardinals for employment and other support.¹⁶² On the other hand, the fame of Giannozzo Manetti, who (despite the clear preference for the *vita contemplativa* expressed in his biographical works) combined humanism with an active political life, is said to be "dimmer" than that of other humanists; he is held up as an example that "sure ability in one activity is worth more for fame and reputation than combining several different activities in which one is not the best."¹⁶³ Worse than pursuing one's own political career is involving oneself in political intrigue. Alessandro cites Cola Montano, whose republican rabble-rousing led to the murder of Galeazzo Maria Sforza of Milan (1476) and thus to his own "sad end," as an example that "nothing is more unsuitable than turning literature, which is nourished by leisure and which requires free time for practice, to ruinous civil discord."¹⁶⁴ Cortesi's opposition to political involvement was undoubtedly shaped by the harsh suppression of Pomponio Leto's Academy in 1468 in response to its supposed involvement in a coup against Paul II.¹⁶⁵ Even more so than our first three authors, who elicited surprise by ignoring the purported political dimension of humanism that is so familiar to us, Cortesi, like Manetti, belies any essential link between humanism and civic or republican engagement.

If political involvement was off limits to humanists, so was petty competition with one another for popular fame. Citing the fate of Andrea Contrario and Francesco Griffolini, who wished each other dead rather than countenance the other's reputation (and who, incredibly, each died in the manner desired by the other), Antonio complains that some humanists

¹⁶¹ Cf. Ferratù, "Introduzione," pp. 37–38.

¹⁶² This was a distinctive mark of Roman curial humanism. See D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 3–37. For the mechanisms of patronage and the duties and rewards of curial officials, see Partner, *The Pope's Men*.

¹⁶³ Cortesi, *DHD*, 134.3–6: "Ex quo profecto intelligi potest plus valere ad famam et celebritatem nominis unius simplicis generis virtutem absolutam quam multa annexa genera virtutum non perfectarum." It is worth noting that this passage undermines Burckhardt's notion of the "Renaissance man."

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.7–12: "tristem exitum habuit. / [Alex.] . . . Nihil est enim, ut opinor, incongruentius quam litteras, quae aluntur ocio et usui commodoque parantur, ad perniciem hominum seditionemque convertere." On Cola Montano, professor of Latin in Milan and an early promoter of the printing press, see Paolo Orvieto, "Capponi, Nicola, detto Cola Montano," in *DBI*, vol. XIX (1976), pp. 83–86.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Anthony F. D'Elia, *A Sudden Terror: The Plot to Murder the Pope in Renaissance Rome* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009).

have “turned competition, which is otherwise quite useful, to injury, and everywhere the whole vulgar mob unanimously rushes to judgment.”¹⁶⁶ Proper competition, instead, is dignified and aimed at winning the approval of a learned judge.¹⁶⁷

A quiet, contemplative life of literary study was attended by true glory and virtue, as opposed to the ostensible virtue of noble birth or military accomplishments. At last, one of our authors chants the tune familiar from the humanist educational treatises and the letters of Guarino. It is surprising that we must wait until the end of the fifteenth century for this to be the case. When describing Guarino’s school Cortesi writes:

His house was like a workshop of the *bonae artes*. And although in those days grave and everlasting war raged in Italy, and the state of affairs was such that just about all young men thought that greater glory was to be sought in war rather than in learning, Guarino never interrupted his teaching efforts. His house was full of the noblest youths who had entrusted themselves to his instruction. Everyday they discussed the meaning of texts, practiced speaking, and were thoroughly educated in Greek and Latin.¹⁶⁸

To emphasize the virtue of this purely rhetorical education over that of military honor or of the high birth of his students, Antonio then describes Guarino’s school as “a kind of training ground in the most honorable arts (*honestissimarum artium*).”¹⁶⁹ And later in the dialogue, Antonio cites Campano, who supposedly grew up an impoverished shepherd, as an example of “how little an obscure birth hinders the attainment of virtue” – virtue which he acquired through his “turn to the more serious arts.”¹⁷⁰

Nevertheless, virtue did not grace all humanists, as we saw above in the rabble-rouser Cola Montano and the dishonorable competitors Andrea Contrario and Francesco Griffolini. Another example of vicious humanism comes in the person of Francesco Filelfo, here criticized for his greed:

¹⁶⁶ Cortesi, *DHD*, 173.13–15: “Utilissimum certamen convertunt ad iniuriam atque omnis undique concurrunt ad iudicandum consentiens indoctorum turba.”

¹⁶⁷ As in the case of Niccolò Valla, who desired only the approval of Theodore Gaza. See *ibid.*, 170.3–5.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.4–12 (incorrectly labeled as 3–11): “huius domus quasi officina quaedam fuit bonarum artium. Nam, cum illis temporibus diuturno gravissimoque bello Italia flagraret et is esset rerum status ut nemo fere adolescens non sibi potius gloriam bello quam doctrina quaerendam putarit, nunquam sunt ab eo instituendi ac docendi studia intermissa. Erat referta domus nobilissimis adolescentibus qui se in eius disciplinam tradiderant: quotidie et commentabantur et declamabant ac ita diligenter Graecis Latinisque litteris erudiebantur.”

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.15 (incorrectly labeled as 14): “tanquam ex ludo quodam honestissimarum artium.”

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.6–15: “Is enim meo iudicio coeteris exemplo esse potest quam parum obsit ad virtutem comparandam obscuro loco nasci . . . gravioribus artibus applicaretur.” Ferrau (*ibid.*, p. 158, n. 64) considers the story of Campano’s youth apocryphal.

He was an utterly mercenary writer, one who preferred money to literary fame. For it is common knowledge that there was no Italian prince of his age whom he did not visit, none to whom he did not pay compliments with his writings, in order to dig money out of him.¹⁷¹

There is thus a fine line between relying on princes for patronage and being a hired pen: on one side lies the virtuous pursuit of honorable praise, reputation, and remuneration, on the other base economic calculation. Be that as it may, Alessandro defends Filelfo: "To me he seems wise for having procured enrichment with literature, especially since eloquence tends to become more hateful and suspicious the greater it is."¹⁷² This defense makes us wonder whether the virtue of a Campano or a Gaza was the rule among humanists or the exception.

Like Giannozzo Manetti, Paolo Cortesi envisions a hierarchy within humanism based on adherence to a set of values. The two agree that the yardstick is the contemplative life. Cortesi goes further, though, positing standards of civil discourse, aloofness from the uneducated, and honorable commerce with patrons. His ideal is a leisured existence, detached from petty, mundane concerns, devoted to eloquent expression and the glory it brings.

This ideal can be brought into better perspective by considering the relationship of Cortesi's *homines docti* to their model, the ancient *oratores* and especially Cicero. As has been emphasized many times, eloquence is a fraught endeavor for Cortesi's humanists, simultaneously bringing them closer to the ancients but, so long as true eloquence remained out of reach, highlighting the distance between them. The divide between ancients and moderns, however, is deeper and wider than Cortesi intimates, for the milieu of the humanists was markedly different from that of the orators of Cicero's time. Most importantly, ancient Roman orators were first and foremost just that – orators. Theirs was an essentially spoken art,¹⁷³ whereas humanists, except when performing their poetry or delivering orations – genres which all our authors depict as minor – concentrated mostly on written works. Therefore the ancient orators' preparation included delivery and memory in addition to the precepts of invention, arrangement, and

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 150.3–7: "Sed erat vendibilis sane scriptor et is qui opes quam scribendi laudem consequi malebat. Constat enim neminem principum illis temporibus in Italia fuisse, quin adierit, quin cum scriptis salutaverit, ut ex his pecuniam erueret."

¹⁷² Ibid., 151.1–3: "Mihi vero ille . . . hoc facto sapiens videtur, qui ex litteris divitias quaesierit, propterea quod eloquentia, quo maior est, eo hominibus invidior ac suspectior."

¹⁷³ See Cicero, *Brutus*, xxviii.108, where he makes a neat distinction between orators and "men of letters" (*studiosi litterarum*). Another nice distinction between writers and true orators is found at lxxvii.267, with regard to "Marcus Bibulus, whose activity in writing, and writing carefully, is surprising, since he was no orator" (tr. Hendrickson).

style, while the humanists focused on the latter.¹⁷⁴ Even written works were meant to be read aloud in antiquity and were thus also more oriented towards performance than those of humanists, which were intended for silent reading (a partial cause, one imagines, for the slow development of the ancient *numerus* bemoaned by Cortesi's characters).¹⁷⁵

Audiences were also different. Obviously both groups, since highly educated, aimed for the approval of their learned peers. Ancient orators, however, also had to be approved by the common people. Furthermore, Cicero argues that the ignorant multitude and the expert will agree in identifying good and bad orators, the only difference between them being that the former will know *that* an oration was good or bad, the latter also *why*.¹⁷⁶ This is the opposite of Cortesi's position that the "vulgar mob" is not a good judge and thus that humanists should shun its fickle praise.

Another important difference is that ancient Roman orators were emphatically political operators, effective oratory being necessary for high advancement in the *cursus honorum*. Cortesi's humanists, on the other hand, had for the most part no political power; their eloquence was mainly useful (when its use was considered) for a kind of career advancement that, while unavoidably intermingled with political figures (such as their patrons or civic employers), was almost always disconnected from direct political activity. Reconsiderations of the Baron thesis have revealed a similar distance from ideological engagement and direct political participation even in Florentine humanism. In the case of the pivotal figure of Leonardo Bruni, James Hankins has argued that he was "not the fiery republican ideologue and populist of Hans Baron's imagination." Indeed, his "famous orations" were

not intended to reflect either historical reality or Bruni's own political convictions. Their primary purpose was to serve as propaganda vehicles, and their primary audience was foreign elites.¹⁷⁷

Similarly, but pulling the levers of power even less directly themselves, curialists in Rome were instrumental in crafting a new image of papal

¹⁷⁴ Cortesi does, however, pay attention to both of these pillars of ancient oratory in relation to humanist orations. See, e.g., Cortesi, *DHD*, 183.6–7, where Bernardo Giustinian is said to use the excellence of his delivery to cover up for his sub-par Latin, and 180.6–11, where Bartholomeo Lampridio is mocked for his terrible memory and subsequent oratorical flops. The performative aspect of Latin received greater stress in Rome in the period directly following Cortesi's departure from the city, roughly 1500–1530. See Benedetti, *Ex perfecta antiquorum eloquentia*.

¹⁷⁵ See Paul Saenger, *Space between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford, 1997).

¹⁷⁶ See Cicero, *Brutus*, xlix.184–liv.200.

¹⁷⁷ See Hankins (ed.), *Renaissance Civic Humanism*, pp. 11–12, and the essays by Hankins, Mikael Hörnqvist, and John Najemy. Quotation at p. 12.

hegemony through their letters, orations, diplomacy at Church councils, and transformation of the liturgy.¹⁷⁸ Yet it is not for these works and services that they gained distinction as humanists in Cortesi's world, but rather for their contribution to the revival of Latin eloquence. And their audience, far from being composed of foreign elites or domestic politicians, was made up of other humanists.

This brings us to a final distinguishing characteristic of the Renaissance milieu: if for ancient orators eloquence was in the service of a career, usually political, for humanists like Cortesi a career in a chancery, at the curia, or as a personal secretary was ideally in the service of eloquence. Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine have argued in the opposite direction in *From Humanism to the Humanities*, assuming that there was nothing "in it," so to speak, for humanists beyond a professional opportunity. Thus with regard to female humanists, to whom no career path was open, they conclude that all humanist learning could be was a hollow "end in itself, like fine needlepoint or the ability to perform ably on lute or virginals."¹⁷⁹ In fact, Cortesi does see humanism primarily as an end in itself – but a glorious, not a hollow one. Of course, he also sees it as a way to get his bread buttered. Humanists naturally sought advancement, patronage, even high rank. And why not? No matter how much of the monastic ideal the humanists adopted, they could not achieve glory, much less feed their stomachs, by ostensibly humbling their station. Humanists enunciated no ideal of holy poverty; there was no institutional apparatus (of Orders, cloisters, or monasteries) to support all but the desert hermit humanists who rejected even its modest comfort; and there was no equivalent *servus servorum humanitatis*. Cortesi wrote all of his works with preferment in mind, and he penned his own masterpiece, *De cardinalatu*, as a means to winning a red hat for himself. But these were not his paramount goals, nor did he present them as the goals of (or as criteria for judging) the humanists in his intellectual and cultural community. What Cortesi's humanists did seek, as Christopher Celenza has argued for humanism in general, was distinction in the world of Latin letters.¹⁸⁰ And what Cortesi sought personally was to be recognized as the Cicero of his generation. In giving voice to the goals and ideals of Italian humanists towards the end of the fifteenth century, Cortesi betrays none of the propaganda, advertising,

¹⁷⁸ Hankins, "The Popes and Humanism," pp. 478–484; O'Malley, *Praise and Blame*.

¹⁷⁹ Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, p. 56.

¹⁸⁰ See Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance*, pp. 115–133, esp. 119, where Celenza gives his argument in a nutshell: "esteem and honor depended mostly on what their fellow intellectuals thought of their literary effort."

or cynicism that Grafton and Jardine identified in humanist discourse. Nor do I think it sensible, much less necessary, to read Cortesi cynically. *De hominibus doctis* is not an attempt to sell humanism to outsiders but a declaration of preeminence to other members of the same community. Cortesi is announcing, “I am the best of *us*, recognize my excellence,” not “I have something that *you* need, and you can buy it from me.” If we want to understand what was “in it” for humanists, to understand why they chose to participate in the humanist community as opposed to another, why they evince rapture at a well-formulated period and could wish their stylistic enemies dead, in short, why they make an ideal of Latin eloquence, we must resist the temptation to reduce their behavior entirely to the lowest common denominator of economic and political advantage. We must learn to listen – not naïvely but intelligently and with searching sympathy – when they tell us. What Cortesi tells us is that, as opposed to Cicero’s *oratores*, for whom eloquence was a means to an end, for the *homines docti* of the Italian Renaissance, eloquence was the end.

Culture and barbarism

Eloquence as an end in itself might seem a mere, or worse a rarefied, aesthetic goal, one whose realization, while noteworthy, remains at the periphery and not at the center of civilization. For Cortesi, however, reviving ancient eloquence meant restoring the hallmark of Roman culture in his own times, culture understood in its original, restricted, magnificent sense as the cultivation and refinement of human life. Eloquence was the gateway to creative flourishing, the vehicle for transcending the supposed barbarism of the Middle Ages and restoring the splendor of antiquity.

One way to understand the importance claimed for eloquence is to take notice of “the reasons for which the *studia eloquentiae* were utterly removed from Italy”¹⁸¹ in the first place. Using an historical paradigm made popular by Biondo Flavio, Antonio explains:¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Cortesi, *DHD*, 108.10–11: “hae causae quae eloquentiae studia funditus ex Italia sustulerunt.”

¹⁸² Ferraù, “Introduzione,” p. 23, believes that Bruni is the source for Cortesi. Yet Cortesi does not attribute the decline of language to the Romans’ loss of liberty under the emperors, as does Bruni; and for Bruni the barbarian invasions are not the first strike against Roman culture but the deathblow. Biondo’s paradigm in the *Decades* seems to fit better. See Angelo Mazzocco, “Decline and Rebirth in Bruni and Biondo,” in Paolo Brezzi and Maristella de Panizza Lorch (eds.), *Umanesimo a Roma nel Quattrocento* (Rome, 1984), pp. 249–266. Consider also the description and discussion of Biondo’s view of the vernacular as a corruption of Latin resulting from the barbarian invasions in Mazzocco, *Linguistic Theories*, ch. 1 and esp. p. 17. For Bruni’s view, see his *Vite di Dante e del Petrarca*, pp. 554–555.

First, the transfer of the imperial seat from Italy to Greece seems to me to have contributed most to the expulsion of eloquence. Thereafter the entrance to Italy was left open to barbarian cruelty, and the means of Roman rule collapsed. The barbarian nations, angry at their long servitude and eager to wipe out the Roman name, fell upon Italy like on easy prey. Great calamities ensued: citizens were driven from their homes; savage peoples were mixed into our race; cities were overthrown; and the commonwealth, once so prosperous, perished. These peoples, however, were not content with their spoils, but kept possession of Italy for about one thousand years, shaking it with the bitterest violence. Hence our intermixing with the barbarians; hence the childish, polluted manner so many have of speaking Latin; hence the destruction and burning of an infinite abundance of books. For these reasons budding minds were robbed of all ability and, submerged deep in barbarism, became enfeebled.¹⁸³

Constantine's *translatio imperii* from Rome to Constantinople weakened Italy, leaving it vulnerable to attack.¹⁸⁴ The Gothic invasions wiped out what was left of Roman administration, destroyed Italy's well-being, and uprooted Roman culture, which was connected to linguistic purity and was represented above all by books. An age of stultifying barbarism began.

Cortesi envisions humanism as the inverse of this barbarous removal of cultivated eloquence from Italy: a *translatio studii* in which the literary culture of ancient Rome returns after one thousand years to its modern counterpart. The preservers and carriers of this culture are learned Byzantines like Chrysoloras, George of Trebizond, Cardinal Bessarion, and John Argyropoulos, who pass on their knowledge of the *ars* to their Italian protégés.¹⁸⁵ As we saw above, Chrysoloras sparked humanist eloquence by

¹⁸³ Cortesi, *DHD*, 108.12–109.1: “Ac primum mihi quidem videtur translatio illa domicilii imperii Romani ex Italia in Thraciam non minimam attulisse eloquentiae iacturam; qua profecto emigratione et aditus Italiae patuerunt barbaricae nationes, odio diuturnae servitutis ac delendi nominis Romani cupiditate, in Italiam tamquam ad certam praedam confluerunt; ex quo tantae calamitates sequutae sunt ut cives suis sedibus pellerentur, immanes gentes in nostrum genus infunderentur et civitates everterentur et fortunatissima quondam respublica dilaberetur. Nec vero solum hae nationes una tantum praeda contentae fuerunt, sed etiam mille prope annorum Italiae possessionem acerbissima vexatione tenuerunt. Hinc colligatio affinitatis cum barbaris, hinc multis involucris inquinata Latine loquendi consuetudo, hinc direpta atque exusta infinita librorum copia. Quibus rebus factum est ut nascentia ingenia omni ope destituta et penitus in barbariem immersa languerint.”

¹⁸⁴ On the origin of the notion that Constantine's *translatio imperii* caused Rome's decline, see Patricia Osmond de Martino, “The ‘Idea of Constantinople’: A Prolegomenon to Further Study,” *Historical Reflections/Réflexions historiques*, 15:2 (Summer, 1998), pp. 323–336.

¹⁸⁵ For an overview of the role played by Byzantines in the development of Italian humanism, see Deno J. Geanakoplos, “Italian Humanism and Byzantine Émigré Scholars,” in Rabil (ed.), *Renaissance Humanism*, vol. II, pp. 350–381.

bringing his teaching “to Italy from beyond the sea,” and George of Trebizond used his knowledge of Aristotelian rhetoric to increase the diffusion of the *oratorium artificium* in Italy. The other Byzantines are also presented as classroom teachers (Gaza, Argyropoulos) or informal points of reference for Italians seeking to increase their eloquence (Gaza, Bessarion). This cultural transfer began with the Ottoman threat to Byzantium at the turn of the fifteenth century.¹⁸⁶ Then “the Greeks (*Graeci*) brought many things to Italy, and likewise the Italians (*nostri*) went to Constantinople to study as if to a kind of home of learning (*domus doctrinae*).”¹⁸⁷ When the *domus doctrinae* was conquered, however, “Latin letters received a deep wound,” the only consolation being that “more Byzantine scholars flooded into Italy then ever before.”¹⁸⁸

It is unclear where exactly Byzantine expertise comes from. Since Cicero in his *Brutus* cites the Greeks as the source of ancient Roman eloquence, which moved from East to West along with philosophy in the first *translatio studii*, perhaps Cortesi sees the Greeks as perpetually eloquent and learned, ever able throughout the ages to pass on their art to others. On the other hand, he might well perceive the Byzantines as the inheritors of a continuous Roman cultural tradition dating to the days of Constantine’s *translatio imperii*, with the culture of the old empire following the capital across the sea to the Nova Roma at Byzantium. Such would be in accord with Cortesi’s claim that eloquence was “removed” and “expelled” from Italy, not destroyed, in the wake of the *translatio imperii*. Cortesi also would have known that the Byzantines considered themselves, correctly, to be Romans and called themselves such (*Rhomaioi*), although this identification was generally rejected in the Latin West.¹⁸⁹ But no matter whether Constantinople represented a true home or simply a place of exile for Roman culture, it was the source from which humanist eloquence flowed.

Now it is clear why Cortesi considers the Byzantine émigrés to be neither *barbari* nor *externi* but rather to belong to *nostri* (although in discussing the conquest of Constantinople he explicitly calls them *Graeci*). When

¹⁸⁶ For the role of the Turks, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 131.3–10.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 131.13–15: “a Graecis multa in Italiam importarentur et nostri item studiorum causam Bisantium tanquam ad domum quandam doctrinae proficiscerentur.”

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 131.3–4: “magnum vulnus res Latinae ex direptione Bisantii”; 132.3–4: “plures post importunam illam cladem in Italiam confluxisse quam unquam antea.” Argyropoulos is said explicitly to have come to Italy as a refugee (164.3–4: “is, cum bello Bisantino domo pulsus in Italiam venisset, multos docuit”).

¹⁸⁹ On the Roman identity of what is commonly called the Byzantine empire, see Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformation of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, 2007).

Chrysoloras began his teaching, he was reinstating the common culture that linked the descendents of the Western and Eastern Romans of late antiquity. To the extent that they were the modern carriers of a shared past, these *Graeci* were as much *nostri* as native-born Italians. The sharply qualified praise of a *barbarus* like Janus Pannonius also makes more sense now, as does the prejudice against his people as “less receptive to the Muses.” If it was northern European peoples who expelled eloquence from Italy in the first place, why should they be receptive to it now that the Italians were busy putting their shattered culture back together? Such would seem to be the thought process of Alessandro.¹⁹⁰

Cortesi’s vision of a *translatio studii* emphasizes continuity with the ancient past, linking the cultural greatness of ancient Rome and its *oratores* to modern Rome and its *homines docti* through a common, timeless pursuit. Significantly, Cortesi nowhere uses the metaphor of rebirth, of renaissance, to describe humanism, and thus although his historical paradigm announces decline it does not imply death. Rather, the ancient *studia eloquentiae* had moved away, or fallen asleep, or been taken prisoner, or lost their voice, or been abandoned in the dark; and now they are being saved from ruin, wakened from sleep, freed from barbarism, or returned to light by the humanists.¹⁹¹ This may seem like hair-splitting, but if we are to take Cortesi on his own terms and not on those to which we have become accustomed, we should recognize that, as far as he was concerned, humanists were not reanimating something that had utterly passed out of existence, as is implied in the metaphor of death and rebirth – a mainstay of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century descriptions of the visual arts.¹⁹² Rather, they were restoring an ancient tradition that had been lost for a thousand years *to them* but which had enjoyed continuous thriving in the New Rome of Byzantium. Now the Eastern Romans, in the face of the Ottoman conquest, were returning to Italy, the ancient center of the *imperium*, bringing its culture, its eloquence, back with them. Over the

¹⁹⁰ Distaste for the *barbari* was a hallmark of the historical Alessandro Farnese. See Léon Dorez, *La Cour du Pape Paul III*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1932), vol. I, p. 23.

¹⁹¹ For the metaphor of waking eloquence from sleep, see Cortesi, *DHD*, 103.22–23; for freedom from barbarism, 101.8–10; for the return to light from darkness, 101.7–8; for muteness, see above, note 37; for abandonment, 101.12–13; for being saved from ruin, 103.12.

¹⁹² See Salvatore Settis, “Art History and Criticism,” in Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis (eds.), *The Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), pp. 78–83, esp. 80; and Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renaissance in Western Art* (New York, 1969/1972), ch. 1: “Renaissance” – Self-Definition or Self-Deception.” Cf. also Garin, *Rinascite e rivoluzioni*, pp. 5–47, and esp. 39–47, where Garin distinguishes between the humanist revolutionary dream of *renovatio*, “che... vuole cambiare il mondo” (p. 41), and the Vasarian sense of *rinascita* as a “momento di un ciclo naturale” (p. 46).

course of the fifteenth century Rome gained in importance, once again becoming, as Cortesi presents it, the center of humanistic culture. And now, in Cortesi and his generation, Rome might have fully regained its *oratores*, evidence for which is provided by *De hominibus doctis* itself.

It has been argued that the linguistic restoration of High Renaissance Rome was linked, at least on a subconscious level, to a new imperial vision of the papacy, and that the linguistic orthodoxy required by Ciceronianism doubled as a tool of social and religious control.¹⁹³ It is thus tempting to link Cortesi's modern *translatio studii* with yet another *translatio imperii*, but Cortesi himself does not do so. There is not one hint in the dialogue that the cultural restoration of ancient Rome is connected to its political or military restoration, much less that the city has regained its status as the seat of a world empire, political or cultural. *De hominibus doctis* is not the *Elegantiae*, the Latin style manual in which half a century earlier Lorenzo Valla had programmatically and somewhat drunkenly proclaimed, *romanum imperium ibi esse, ubi romana lingua dominatur* ("The Roman Empire exists where the Roman language holds sway").¹⁹⁴ It is possible that the connection between language and power was so obvious to Cortesi as to need neither elaboration nor even a wink. Yet a celebration of papal imperialism does not fit very well with a dedication to Lorenzo de' Medici. Then again, neither does the dialogue's glorification of Roman humanism at the expense of Florentine developments.

Thankfully, if we are searching for a deeper significance to *De hominibus doctis*, there is no need to speculate. For Cortesi clearly infuses humanism with a transcendent cultural meaning, one related not to military power or lordship – whose glory he rejects in no uncertain terms in the description of Guarino's school – but to the fulfillment of man's highest creative potential. If the effect of the Gothic invasions was that "budding minds were robbed of all ability and, submerged deep in barbarism, became enfeebled,"¹⁹⁵ then the task of humanism was to recreate the conditions for the intellectual flourishing that had reigned in ancient Rome, or rather *the* condition: Latin eloquence. The emphasis on intellectual liberation from barbarism evokes an important aspect of Eugenio Garin's interpretation of humanism.¹⁹⁶ Garin argued that humanism liberated the human mind by putting it in active dialogue with the ancients, resulting in the "acquisition

¹⁹³ Hankins, "The Popes and Humanism," pp. 482–483; Hankins, "Roma caput mundi," pp. 501–503. Cf. also D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 115–143.

¹⁹⁴ As quoted in Hankins, "Roma caput mundi," p. 502. For a further discussion of Valla's *Elegantiae*, see below, pp. 196–198.

¹⁹⁵ See above, note 183. ¹⁹⁶ Cf. Garin, *Rinascite e rivoluzioni*, pp. 5–38.

of historical consciousness and critical consciousness, of awareness of self and others, of an understanding of the fullness of the human world and its development."¹⁹⁷ But for Cortesi the rub is not in dialogue, nor in specific ancient texts, nor necessarily in any kind of research into antiquity, nor even in consciousness of any particular thing. Rather, the liberating potential of humanism resides in the power of proper language, in eloquence itself.

Cortesi posits a strict and direct relationship between eloquence and intellectual potential: the latter can only rise as high as the former allows it, no matter how great any individual's natural talents. It is not so much the emotive capacity of eloquence as the knowledge necessary for it, *oratorium artificium* or *doctrina*, that unleashes the potential of *ingenium*, a term which might be translated as "natural ability," "native intelligence," or simply "talent." Poliziano had argued that *ingenium* sufficed for eloquence;¹⁹⁸ Cortesi rejects this position: "For no one is so full of natural ability (*ingenium*) and so diligent in imitation as to be able to compose well without knowledge of the *ars* of speech."¹⁹⁹

That eloquence is necessary for intellectual expression and not only for aesthetic effect emerges from the treatment of Dante. There Antonio marvels at the poet's "daring to treat such difficult and abstruse subjects in the vernacular," the implication clearly being that the vernacular is generally incapable of expressing them.²⁰⁰ Dante's merits end up overshadowed by his being "unintelligible in other things whose meaning is not obvious enough."²⁰¹ The vernacular lacks the *oratorium artificium* available in eloquent Latin.²⁰² What is at stake in the case of Dante is therefore no simple stylistic issue. His problem is not that he did not write beautifully enough or persuasively enough – indeed he is praised for these very things – but

¹⁹⁷ Garin, *L'educazione in Europa*, p. 103 (as quoted in Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, p. 15).

¹⁹⁸ Black, "New Laws," pp. 134–138. Consider also Angelo Poliziano, *Commento inedito alle Selve di Stazio*, ed. Lucia Cesarini Martinelli (Florence, 1978), p. 29.18–23: "Verum nulla tanta ars est, quae afflationem illam mentis, quam *enthousiasmón* Graeci dicunt, imitari possit, unde existit Platonis illa atque ante ipsum Democriti opinio: 'poetam bonum neminem sine inflammatione animorum existere posse et sine quodam afflatu quasi furoris.' Sed de poetico furore paulo post suo tempore plura dicemus."

¹⁹⁹ See above, note 49. Cortesi's position is representative of wider trends in the direction of transforming the notion of eloquence into one of technical proficiency. See Fumaroli, *L'Âge de l'éloquence*.

²⁰⁰ See above, note 38.

²⁰¹ Cortesi, *DHD*, 114.4: "sed interdum etiam rebus non satis apertis obscurus."

²⁰² Thus Cortesi contradicts Dante's position on the illustrious potential of the vernacular as enunciated in the first treatise of the *Convivio* and the *De vulgari eloquentia*, a potential he strove to reach in his own writings. See Mazzocco, *Linguistic Theories*, chs. 2 and 8.

that he could not express complicated ideas clearly. Whether Dante was able to *think* complicated ideas is not an issue explored by Cortesi, but the implication is that he could not rise to the highest level of thought; it is difficult to imagine too distinct a line between internal comprehension and the ability to express oneself clearly. And such is implied in Antonio's claim that "minds were robbed of all ability . . . and became enfeebled" in the wake of the barbarian invasions and the subsequent pollution of language. Dante's times, in not permitting eloquence, did not permit his extraordinary *ingenium* to flourish as it otherwise might have.

The calculus of *ingenium* and *doctrina* present in any given age or individual person provides Cortesi with his criterion for judging. It was a lack of *doctrina* that kept the forerunners of humanism from writing anything worthwhile, whereas it was Chrysoloras' reintroduction of it that set humanism in motion. The progressive recovery of the *ars* of rhetoric throughout the fifteenth century increasingly enabled its participants to reach the potential of their *ingenium*. As we have seen, writers belonging to the early humanist generations of Bruni and Valla are often said to have been held back by the "iniquity" or "vice"²⁰³ of their times rather than by any fault of their own. True eloquence simply was not possible until later. First with Piccolomini (if Antonio's praise is indeed genuine) did *doctrina* catch up with *ingenium*. The reason that Piccolomini "could be called the only true humanist in this army of learned men" is that "he was endowed equally with natural ability (*natura*) and *doctrina*."²⁰⁴ Thereafter the relationship between *ingenium* and *doctrina* reached equilibrium, at least in a few exemplary individuals like Calderini, Gaza, and Platina. The combined efforts of the humanists had made enough *doctrina* available that one needed only apply the proper *ingenium* to achieve, or almost achieve, eloquence.²⁰⁵

This is the sense in which "the times" are what essentially separate a Dante or a Petrarch from a Bruni from a Piccolomini from a Cortesi: the

²⁰³ E.g., the forerunners of humanism were held back by "iniquitas temporum" (Cortesi, *DHD*, 116.12); Bruni's "vitium" is not his own but rather belongs to his "aetati" (121.11). See also pp. 155–156 above.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.2–4: "Licet enim hunc prope solum oratorem ex hac acie doctorum adducere, cui natura pariter et doctrina inservierit."

²⁰⁵ Calderini is characterized as "ingenio peracri et flagranti studio" (*ibid.*, 159.10–11); Gaza "non modo acuire industriam, sed etiam alere quibusdam orationis nutrimentis in ingenium possit" (161.14–15); Platina "plurimum . . . ingenio et doctrina valuisse" (167.8–9). Campano is the exception which proves the rule, since he "could not bear studying, which often happens to those swelling and overflowing with natural talents" (155.13–14: "studiorum laborem ferre non poterat, quod saepe fere contigit uberrimis ingeniis habundantibus").

times are equivalent to the sum of *doctrina* available for refining the raw material of *ingenium*. Antiquity had been a “good time,” the Middle Ages a “bad” one, in which minds had become “enfeebled” by the pollution of language and the loss of books. Humanists set about restoring the necessary theoretical knowledge (*doctrina*, *artificium*, *ars*) for bringing “good times” back to the present in the form of eloquence, in which complex thought and beauty of expression are united. Humanism set the stage for *ingenium*’s reprise. Hence Cortesi’s decision to call the humanists *homines docti*, “learned men.” If their lack of true eloquence marked their distance from the *oratores* of antiquity, it was precisely their greater knowledge of the *ars* of speech, their greater learning (*doctrina*), that distinguished them from the writers of the Middle Ages and put them on track to regain the ancient title.

Indeed, they might have stood before an even grander future. For although Cortesi emphasizes the inferiority of most, if not all, of the Quattrocento to the age of Cicero, in another respect he suggests that the outlook might be brighter on his side of the *medium aevum* of barbarism. The dominant subtheme of Cicero’s *Brutus* is that, despite the perfection of oratory achieved in the figure of Cicero, the civil wars and Caesar’s imminent overthrow of the Republic have ended free speech and thus destroyed the place of oratory in public life.²⁰⁶ The eloquence that so far had secured the young Brutus a brilliant career already seems doomed, and therefore the triumph Cicero enjoys in his own rhetoric is bittersweet; he shall likely have no heirs. The situation is manifestly different for Cortesi, who presides over a resurgence of eloquence promoted, not threatened, by the modern Roman (pontifical) principate.²⁰⁷

The comparison to Brutus is not idle. For although it has been stressed throughout this chapter that Cortesi presents himself as a new Cicero, he could also be considered a new but very different kind of Brutus – a modern heir to Cicero set to take up where the great mentor left off. The parallel emerges on the formal level, with the character of Paolo taking the place in *De hominibus doctis* occupied by Brutus in the Ciceronian dialogue named for him.²⁰⁸ It is not, however, Brutus’ reputation as a republican

²⁰⁶ On the political subtext of the *Brutus*, cf. Douglas, “Introduction,” pp. xi–xv.

²⁰⁷ For a succinct description of the symbiosis between humanism and the Roman ecclesiastical hierarchy, see D’Amico, “Humanism in Rome,” pp. 264–274; at greater length, see D’Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 3–60.

²⁰⁸ Antonio takes the place of the authoritative main speaker, Cicero, and Alessandro fills Atticus’ role as wealthy aristocrat and junior active partner. Paolo, like Brutus, plays a passive part and serves mostly to move the conversation along.

tyrannicide that attracts Cortesi but rather his status as Cicero's protégé.²⁰⁹ As seen in the criticism of Cola Montano, humanism and its rhetorical education are not supposed to be turned to political involvement and certainly not to political murder. Cortesi's ideal is not that of the republican orator or political operative but of the leisured aesthete, the retainer of princes who as a reward for his faithful service receives their patronage of his private passion.²¹⁰ If he follows the true spirit of humanism, his contemplative life of study will adorn him with virtue and win him the honorable praise of the expert few for his hard-won eloquence. Brutus had taken up the tradition of Ciceronian eloquence, but not that of quiet study. Cortesi would now set things right. Ever since Petrarch's discovery of the *Familiar Letters*, Cicero had presented a double aspect to his admirers, who often felt themselves obliged to take sides over his seemingly split personality. Did his essence lie in shrewd involvement in republican politics, or in the enjoyment of a retired life of literature? Cortesi obviously chose the latter, and he therefore considered himself, in a way superior to the historical Brutus, to be Cicero's proper heir: one who makes his peace with princely power – in modern times the Roman papacy – to secure the flourishing of eloquence. If in 1490 Latin eloquence appeared to have reascended the peak it had previously occupied in 46 BC, humanists had just started to take in the view and had not yet glanced at the downward slope. Especially in Rome, where Ciceronianism reigned and the curia and cardinalate alike had become a reliable source of patronage, the future of eloquence had to seem assured to Cortesi and the intimates of his academy. At least in their small but significant circle, they had managed to reclaim the triumph of Cicero.

²⁰⁹ For the relationship between Cicero and Brutus, both as portrayed in the *Brutus* and in real life, see Douglas, "Introduction," pp. xviii–xxii.

²¹⁰ Partner, *The Pope's Men*, p. 130, sees the upshot for Roman curial humanism as a "drift . . . towards a more conventional, courtly approach to literature and learned leisure." Cf. D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, p. 125.